



Inclusive Schools Support Guide

Promoting Safe and Inclusive Schools

Developed by the Prevention Department
Pinellas County Schools
301 4th Street SW
Largo, FL 33770





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DEDICATION

This guide is dedicated to those who bravely take a stand against injustice and give a voice to those who have been silenced.

Your courage is an act of heroism.

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The San Francisco Unified School District’s Student Support Services Department, from whose website some parts of this guide have been adapted;

The School Board of Broward County’s Diversity, Prevention & Intervention Department, from whose website and Support Guide some parts of this guide have been adapted;

Palm Beach County LGBTQ+ youth and their allies, many of whom have bravely shared their experiences as an often-targeted minority population within the school system; and

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If you have additional questions regarding the information contained in this guide, please contact the Pinellas County Schools Prevention Department at (727) 588-6130.

SUPERINTENDENT REMARKS

Pinellas County Schools is committed to promoting a safe and productive learning environment for all students. We believe that every student should be treated with respect in and out of the classroom. We value the diversity of our community, and we embrace it.

This guide supports our efforts to create a positive climate that protects all students, with a focus on our gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning LGBTQ+ students. Fostering an inclusive environment helps us ensure that every student has access to a high-quality education that supports their social, emotional and academic needs.

Our inclusive curriculum, antibullying programs and clubs that support LGBTQ+ students have improved safety and acceptance in our schools. But we recognize there is always more work to do to promote respect and understanding of our LGBTQ+ students.

This guide plays a key role in developing an informed, active and compassionate community, that supports all students on their educational journey and provides the best opportunities for them to succeed.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This important tool for students and staff will enhance ongoing efforts to make each Pinellas County public school a safer place for *all* students — with emphasis on the community of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ+) students. It further intends to improve the way administrators go about implementing existing federal, state, local laws and policies concerning harassment and discrimination.

All young people, including those who are LGBTQ+, have the right to feel safe and secure in the schools they attend. Students who feel accepted at school are more highly motivated, engaged in learning, and committed to achieving the best possible education.

Recent research in *Educational Leadership* journal (McGarry, 2013) indicate school-based variables serve as sources of resilience for many LGBTQ+ youth. Supportive adults, a clear anti-bullying policy, an LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum, and student clubs such as Gay-Straight Alliances are the four school-based resources that research suggests make a difference for LGBTQ+ students. Considering the extent to which a school provides these sources of resilience and focusing efforts on providing them are important steps for educators to take to build resilience in LGBTQ+ students.

Safety and prevention efforts already established by the State of Florida and Pinellas County Schools have received praise in the broader educational community. Unfortunately, national statistics and Pinellas County data suggest that students who identify or are identified as LGBTQ+ continue to be harassed, threatened, assaulted, and truant out of fear.

This guide provides a review of federal, state and local laws and policies and strategies for creating a safe environment. The PCS Prevention Department believes this guide has the power to save lives.





THE NECESSITY FOR THIS GUIDE

Nationwide, LGBTQ+ students are four times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual counterparts.¹

Please review the following statistics concerning the LGBTQ+ community in our schools to gain a better understanding of the importance and necessity of this guide. Education can save lives when it comes to LGBTQ+ youth. Many face unique challenges based on social stigma and environmental stressors. Some key figures, which come courtesy of the Gay and Lesbian Student Education Network (GLSEN) **2017 National School Climate Survey of 23,001 middle and high school students** ([National School Climate Survey](#)):

Of the LGBTQ+ students surveyed:

96% said being “out” led to higher levels of victimization

95% heard homophobic remarks frequently or often at school

87% experienced harassment or assault

35% skipped school because of safety concerns

57% felt “unsafe” because of their sexual orientation; **43%** because of their gender expression

70% verbally harassed because of sexual orientation; **28%** physically harassed

Please visit [Williams Institute](#) for more LGBTQ+ stats.

¹ U.S. Government study: “Report of the Secretary’s Task Force on Youth Suicide”
<http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED334503.pdf>

DEFINING Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender & Questioning “LGBTQ+”

To understand this guide and most effectively support the LGBTQ+ community in our schools, it is necessary to become familiar with the correct terminology. The definitions below may be referred to when answering classroom questions that may arise, so long as the definitions are modified for age-appropriateness.

Ally: An ally in this context is a cisgender and/or straight-identifying person who chooses to align him- or herself with the LGBTQ+ community. This is the “A” sometimes included in the broader umbrella acronym LGBTQIA.

Androgynous: Having both female and male characteristics – neither distinguishably masculine nor feminine, as in dress, appearance, or behavior.

Biological sex: A person’s external physical anatomy/genitalia (aka, assigned sex at birth) and, their chromosomes, hormones, internal reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics.

Bisexual: The sexual orientation of a person who is physically and emotionally attracted to their own gender and to another gender.

Cisgender: Denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.

Cross-dressing: Refers to the act of wearing clothing and other accoutrements commonly associated with the opposite sex.

Gay: (for grades K-2): A woman who has romantic feelings for another woman; or a man who has romantic feelings for another man.

Gay: (for grades 3-12): A term that can apply to either men or women who are physically and emotionally attracted to persons of the same sex. Although “gay” can refer to both men and women, an alternative term for gay women is “lesbian”.

Gay Straight Alliance (GSA): student-run organizations that unite LGBTQ+ and allied youth to build community and organize around issues impacting them in their schools and communities.

Gender: Unlike a person’s “assigned sex at birth”, which is a biological term, “gender” is a social construct specifying the behaviorally and culturally prescribed characteristics men and women are traditionally expected to embody in a given society. Gender is now understood to have several components, including physical characteristics, gender identity, and gender roles and expression.

Gender Binary: The notions that there exist only two genders, each solidly fixed, biologically-based and attached to various expectations for behavior, appearance and feelings. The gender system, while predominant in most cultures, is not the only model of gender that exists; more nuanced, non-binary understandings of gender have existed throughout history and across cultures.

Gender Expansive: Conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system. A person who has gender characteristics and/or behaviors that do not conform to traditional or societal gender expectations; for example, “feminine” boys and “masculine” girls; and those perceived as androgynous. Other terms used have been gender nonconforming or gender variant.

Gender Expression: A person’s physical characteristics, behaviors, and presentation traditionally linked to either masculinity or femininity, such as: appearance, dress, mannerisms, name and pronouns, speech patterns, and social interactions.

Gender Identity: Refers to a person’s internal, deeply felt sense of being male or female, boy or girl, or other (for example, a blending of the two.) Everyone has a gender identity, even if it does not always correspond with the person’s biological sex.

Genderqueer: Genderqueer individuals typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and often, though not always, sexual orientation.

Gender Role: The social expectations of how a person should act, think, and/or feel based upon one’s biological sex. This definition includes traditional and stereotypical roles, characteristics, mannerisms and behaviors associated with societal norms of what is male and what is female. These expectations are often stereotypical, such as “Boys like blue and girls like pink.”

Heteronormative: The belief system that heterosexuality is the norm; the assumption that heterosexuality is universal and anything other than heterosexuality is unnatural.

Heterosexism: An overt or tacit bias against homosexuality, rooted in the belief that heterosexuality is superior or the norm.

Heterosexual: The sexual orientation of a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex. Often referred to as “straight”.

Homophobia: A fear of or aversion to lesbian, gay, or bisexual people. May also refer to a fear of or aversion to transgender people, as an alternative to the lesser-used “transphobia” (definition below).

Homosexual: The sexual orientation of a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to members of their own gender. Currently, many LGBTQ+ people prefer the term “lesbian” or “gay.”

Intersex: An intersex person has reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn’t correspond to the typical notions of “male” or “female.” Previous generations might have referred to an intersex person as a “hermaphrodite,” which is a derogatory and outdated term. This is the “I” that is sometimes included in the broader umbrella acronym “LGBTQIA.”

Lesbian (for grades K-2): A woman who has romantic feelings for another woman.

Lesbian (for grades 3-12): A term used to describe a woman who is emotionally and physically attracted to another woman.

LGBTQ+: A frequently used acronym that stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (or Queer).

Non-Binary: Any gender identity which does not fit the male and female binary spectrum. Other terms include genderqueer, agender, bigender, and more.

“Out” or “Out of the closet”: A term used to refer to a person whose LGBTQ+ status is, to some degree, public. Note: It is not always the LGBTQ+ person who makes this information public. Sometimes it is made public without the LGBTQ+ person’s knowledge and/or consent. This is called “outing” someone. The act of “outing” an individual can create an at-risk situation.

Pansexual: Someone who is attracted to others regardless of gender, that is, across the spectrum of gender.

Pronouns: The pronoun or set of pronouns that an individual would like others to use when talking to or about that individual. For someone who identifies as male, the pronouns most commonly are “He, Him, His.” For someone who identifies as female, the pronouns most commonly are “She, Her, Hers.” For someone who identifies outside the gender binary, there are several options, including (but not limited to) the singular “They, Them, Theirs.”

Queer: An umbrella term used to describe a sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression that does not conform to dominant societal norms. While “queer” is used as a neutral or even a positive term among many LGBTQ+ people today, some consider it derogatory as historically it had been used negatively.

Questioning: A person who is uncertain of their sexual orientation and/or gender orientation/identity.

Transgender (Grades K-5): When a person feels as if their body does not match who they are as a person. For example, a boy who feels like he is a boy inside but has a girl’s body, or a girl who feels like she is a girl inside but has a boy’s body.

Transgender (Grades 6-12): This term describes a person whose gender identity does not align with his or her physical anatomy. Some transgender people hormonally and/or surgically change their bodies to more fully match their gender identity.

Transition-Social Transition: The process by which a transgender student begins to outwardly express himself or herself as the gender with which he or she identifies. This could mean beginning to wear clothes typically associated with the other gender or asking to be called by a different name or gender pronoun.

Transphobia: An irrational fear or aversion to transgender people.



“If every person, especially teachers, would not allow me or my friends to get harassed because of who I am, school would be a decent place. Unfortunately, that’s not the case.”

– Lesbian youth

REVIEW OF FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL LAWS & POLICIES PROHIBITING DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT

The Pinellas County School Board will continue to follow State and Federal laws. [The Pinellas County Schools Policy Against Bullying and Harassment](#) (5517.01) prohibits discrimination and harassment in our schools against students and staff based upon, among other characteristics, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. This Guide is an extension of the principles upon which these policies are based.

In 2008, [Florida Statute, Section 1006.147](#) was passed. This law prohibits bullying or harassment of any student or employee of a Florida public educational institution; further, it requires each school district to draft a local anti-bullying policy enumerating specific procedures and protected classes.

The Florida Department of Education’s [Principles of Professional Conduct](#) stresses the worth and dignity of every person. In addition, it prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, among other characteristics.

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LAWS/POLICIES

FEDERAL LAW

Amendment XIV of the U.S. Constitution (Equal Protection)

The United States Constitution guarantees *all* people equal protection under the law. This means public school officials and employees (who, for purposes of the Guide, should be considered extensions of the state government) may not single out a student for negative treatment based on prejudices against LGBTQ+ students. Nor may they discriminate against students just because they (or members of the community) disapprove of being gay or because they feel uncomfortable around those who do not conform to traditional gender stereotypes.

Title IX of the Education Amendment Acts of 1972

Federal civil rights statutes reinforce anti-discrimination principles as well. Title IX of the Education Amendment Acts of 1972 (Title IX), 20 U.S.C §§ 1681-1688, prohibits discrimination based on sex in education programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance.

FERPA

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education. Protecting transgender students' privacy is critical to ensuring they are treated consistent with their gender identity.

STATE LAW/POLICY

***State Statute is continuously changing, please check hyperlinks to ensure accuracy.**

[Florida Statute 1000.05](#) prohibits discrimination against students and employees in the Florida K-20 public education system on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, disability, or marital status.

[Florida Department of Education Principles of Professional Conduct for the Education Profession in Florida \(Rule 6A-10.081, F.A.C.\)](#) [Code of Ethics of the Education Profession in Florida](#) states the educator values the worth and dignity of every person, the pursuit of truth, devotion to excellence, acquisition of knowledge, and the nurture of democratic citizenship. Essential to the achievement of these standards are the freedom to learn and to teach and the guarantee of equal opportunity for all.

Section 6A-10.081 of the Principles of Professional Conduct for the Education Profession in Florida goes on to state: Obligation to the student requires that the individual...[s]hall not harass or discriminate against any student on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, national or ethnic origin, political beliefs, marital status, handicapping condition, sexual orientation, or social and family background and shall make reasonable effort to assure that each student is protected from harassment or discrimination.

LOCAL POLICY

The [Pinellas County Office of Human Rights](#) is committed to protecting all citizens of Pinellas County from cases of discrimination in the areas of fair housing, employment, public accommodations, and government programs and assistance. This includes sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

Pinellas County School Board Code of Conduct

Guiding Principles: The primary goal of the District is to ensure that each student achieves at the highest possible level. Education is to be provided in a manner that does not discriminate or cause harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, national or ethnic origin, political beliefs, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, or social and family background. For this to be accomplished every school staff member will strive to create a positive, safe environment that encourages and supports student success.

ANTI-BULLYING LAWS/POLICIES

FEDERAL LAW

The Safe Schools Improvement Act

On May 19, 2019, the Federal Safe Schools Improvement Act was reintroduced in the Senate as a proposed amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This legislation would require public schools to implement a comprehensive anti-bullying policy that enumerates sexual orientation and gender identity as protected categories, among others. It would further require schools to include LGBTQ+ bullying and harassment data in their statewide needs assessment reporting. <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/116/hr2653/text>

STATE LAW

[Florida Statute 1006.147](#) (The Jeffrey Johnston Stand Up for All Students Act) enacted in May 2008, created a statewide prohibition of the bullying or harassment of any student or employee of a public K-12 educational institution; whether at a school, on a school bus, or via electronic device.

The law requires each individual school district to implement a policy outlining the consequences of harassment; the consequences for a wrongful accusation of harassment; and the procedure for immediately notifying the parents of both the victim and the perpetrator of the alleged bullying or harassment. The statute leaves it up to the individual school districts to enumerate specific categories (i.e., race, disability, sexual orientation, etc.) for which bullying is specifically prohibited. Critically, the law provides that “distribution of safe schools funds to a school district...is contingent upon...the Department of Education’s approval of the school district’s bullying and harassment policy.” This means there is actual funding at stake for a non-compliant school.

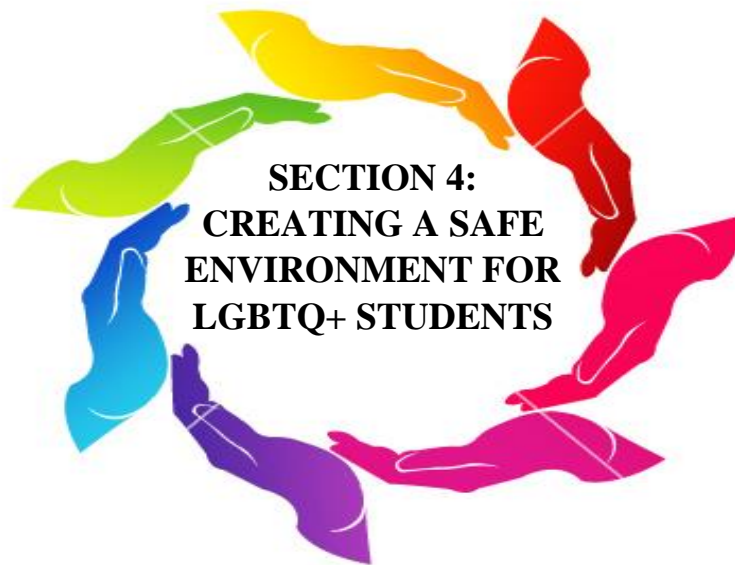
LOCAL POLICY

[Policy 5517.01](#) The School Board of Pinellas County’s Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy 5517.01 prohibits the bullying, harassment, cyberbullying, and cyberstalking of any student or employee on the basis of his/her actual or perceived traits or characteristics, including but not limited to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, age, disability, marital status, citizenship or any other characteristic protected by law.

The policy characterizes “bullying” as:

... systematically and chronically inflicting physical hurt or psychological distress on one or more students or employees.

[Bullying] is further defined as unwanted and repeated written, verbal, or physical behavior, including any threatening, insulting or dehumanizing gestures, by a student or adult, that is severe or pervasive enough to create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive educational environment; cause discomfort or humiliation; or unreasonably interfere with the individual’s school performance or participation.



“One thing that changed the game for me was when a teacher said she would not allow any sort of negative language about race, gender, status, or orientation in her classroom.”

– Gay youth

GUIDELINES FOR AN INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM

An inclusive curriculum **must be in compliance with School Board Policy 2417**. The following should also be considered:

- Literature written by LGBTQ+ authors
- History including LGBTQ+ public figures
- Discussions of families including same-sex parents
- Recognition of national LGBTQ+ events, such as the Day of Silence and LGBT History Month

The Prevention Department houses a resource library of inclusive curriculum materials that may be accessed for schools or classrooms.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

To further facilitate a safe and supportive school environment for all students and staff, the Pinellas County Schools Prevention Department incorporates education and training into their anti-bullying curriculum, student leadership trainings, and staff professional development.

As with other efforts to promote positive school culture, professional development for school staff could include topics on gender identity and gender nonconformity – detailed information in School Board Policies, key terms related to gender identity and expression, and the development of gender identity. Professional development could also include experiences of transgender and other gender nonconforming students, risk and resilience data regarding transgender and gender nonconforming students, ways to support transgender students and to improve the school climate for gender nonconforming students, and gender-neutral language and practices.

CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR LGBTQ+ STUDENTS

Administrators and staff can create a safer learning environment for LGBTQ+ students by using the following:

- Intercepting anti-LGBTQ+ slurs;
- Supporting students who are navigating the delicate process of “coming out,” while at the same time keeping information strictly confidential (in order not to violate students legally-protected privacy rights);
- Displaying Safe Space stickers and posters;
- Helping students establish and promote a Gay-Straight Alliance or Gender and Sexualities Alliance (GSA), within the perimeters of the Federal Equal Access Act; and
- Ensuring dress codes at social events (e.g., proms, dances, and graduations) as well as unofficial documents (e.g., attendance rolls, yearbooks, and graduation announcements) are accommodating of the needs of the LGBTQ+ community.

In short, to the extent certain privileges are available to the heterosexual community of students (for example, being able to take a significant other to the prom or wearing a t-shirt with a non-disruptive political message), those same privileges must be extended to LGBTQ+ students.

GUIDELINES FOR ACCOMODATION OF TRANSGENDER STUDENTS

Transgender students (students who feel their innate, core sense of self and gender does not match their sex assigned at birth) have a set of unique challenges requiring unique accommodations. Among other considerations, these students must be permitted to:

- Be addressed by the name/gender pronoun with which they are comfortable, with parental input where appropriate;
- Be permitted to wear clothing that expresses their consistently asserted gender identity;
- Request to use a restroom and/or locker room corresponding to their consistently asserted gender identity (at a minimum, not be forced to use the restroom and/or locker room that corresponds with their assigned sex at birth). This will be done on a case by case basis while working with the family to determine appropriate use of restrooms and/ or locker rooms; and
- Play on the sports team corresponding with their consistently asserted gender identity, in accordance with the rules of the Florida High School Athletic Association.

Transgender students are disproportionately targeted for harassment and violence both at home and at school. According to the Finding of the [National Transgender Discrimination Survey](#) through the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, more than 42% of transgender students report attempting suicide. **Transgender individuals must be treated with compassion and sensitivity at every turn.**

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

There has been an upward trend from 2013-2017 in the frequency of staff making negative remarks about gender expression. ([National School Climate Survey](#))

Become Aware of the Language You Use

It is only natural that our own experiences shape the language we use. However, sometimes without even realizing it, our words convey messages about the world that may not always be fair or accurate. For example, it is common to refer to a student's parents as "Your family." The fact is, not every student is being raised by a mother and a father. Some students are being raised by a single parent, a grandparent, two moms, or two dads. By perpetuating the stereotype of a traditional nuclear family — or taking it as a given that all boys will grow up to marry girls (and vice versa) — we inadvertently alienate our students who have non-traditional families or are themselves LGBTQ+. Simply becoming aware of the presumptions that affect our word choices is the first step in cultivating a more inclusive classroom experience.

ANTI-LGBTQ+ LANGUAGE

Statistics tell us that anti-LGBTQ+ slurs and bias toward gender-expansive youth abound in our schools, regardless of whether the target of the slur is actually gay, or just perceived to be gay. Here are some guidelines for intervening in anti-LGBTQ+ language (i.e., "dyke," "faggot," "no homo"). The most common is the intended insult, "That's so gay!"

1. What Do You Say to "That's So Gay!"?

STOP IT

Keep it simple with quick responses. You could say:

- "We don't use *gay* as a put-down in this class."
- "It's not OK to say *that's so gay*."
- "It's not OK to use that phrase."
- "What did you mean by that?"
- "You may not have meant to be hurtful, but when you use the word *gay* to mean something is bad or stupid, it is hurtful."
- "Do you know why that comment is hurtful?"
- If you have the time and opportunity to educate on the spot, do it. If you don't, be sure to make time later.

EDUCATE

Whether explained at the moment of the incident or shortly after, be absolutely clear with students that when they use the word “gay” as an insult, they are being disrespectful. Calling something or someone “gay” is hurtful not only to the target (who may or may not be gay), but also to others who may have parents, neighbors, friends or other family members who are gay.

BE PROACTIVE

Create an environment of respect and caring for all students in your class and school. Establish clear school-wide and classroom policies against name-calling and hurtful teasing. If you have been hearing the phrase, “That’s so gay!” at school, be explicit that rules against name-calling include this phrase and other anti-gay put-downs.

DON’T IGNORE IT

Ignoring name-calling and hurtful teasing allows it to continue and possibly get worse. If other students do not see action, they get the message there is nothing wrong with it. Harassment does not go away on its own.

DON’T BE AFRAID OF MAKING THE SITUATION WORSE

Almost any response is better than ignoring the situation. You may not know exactly what to say. However, you must stop the harassment. Taking action reaffirms limits. Interrupting name-calling is not always easy. Experience will help you to become more comfortable handling future situations. In addition, you can always go back to the student and say or do something else if you feel you did not respond effectively.

DON’T EXCUSE THE BEHAVIOR

Saying, “Josh doesn’t really know what it means,” or “Sarah was only joking,” excuses hurtful behavior.

DON’T TRY TO JUDGE HOW UPSET THE TARGET IS

We have no way of knowing how a student is really feeling. Often, targets are embarrassed and pretend they were not offended or hurt. Saying “Michael didn’t seem upset by Laura’s remark” trivializes the child’s feelings. It tells the harasser it is okay to make hurtful comments. It teaches both the child targeted and anyone within hearing range they will not be protected from harassment.

DON’T WORRY ABOUT THE TABLES BEING TURNED

If you are worried a student will respond to your correction by saying something like – “What do you care... are YOU gay?” – prepare a response in advance. An example of your response may be, “My own personal life is completely irrelevant here; bullying is forbidden at this school.” Note: Use your professional judgment and be in touch with what you personally are comfortable disclosing to your students.

2. Names, Pronouns, and Affirmed Gender Pronouns: For PCSB staff

The appropriate use of names and pronouns with students is vital in creating a safe and supportive environment in the school community. Students shall have the right to be addressed by a name and pronoun corresponding to their gender identity as expressed by the individual student, with input by the parent or guardian when appropriate.

The parent(s) or guardian with legal custody of a child may also request that their child be addressed by the student's affirmed name and affirmed gender pronoun that corresponds to the student's gender identity. A court-ordered name or court-ordered gender change is not required to call the child by their affirmed name or gender pronoun. If or when there is receipt of documentation that a student has legally changed the name or gender (per Florida's requirements), the student's education records should be updated to reflect the legal change.

What is a pronoun?

A pronoun is a word that refers to either the people talking (like *I* or *you*) or someone or something that is being talked about (like *she*, *them*, and *this*). Gender pronouns (like *he* and *hers*) specifically refer to people that you are talking about.

What is an "affirmed gender pronoun"?

An "affirmed gender pronoun" (or AGP) is the pronoun that a person chooses to use for themselves. For example: If Xena's preferred pronouns are *she*, *her*, and *hers*, you could say "Xena ate *her* food because *she* was hungry."

What are some commonly used pronouns?

- ***She, her, hers*** and ***he, him, his*** are the most commonly used pronouns. Some people call these "female/feminine" and "male/masculine" pronouns, but many avoid these labels because, for example, not everyone who uses *he* feels like a "male" or "masculine."
- There are also lots of gender-neutral pronouns in use. Here are a few you might hear:
 - ***They, them, theirs*** (Xena ate *their* food because *they* were hungry.) This is a common gender-neutral pronoun. This is a gender-neutral pronoun acceptable for use in the singular form.
- Just my name please! (Xena ate Xena's food because Xena was hungry.) Some people prefer not to use pronouns at all, using their name as a pronoun instead.

Why is it important to respect people's Affirmed Gender Pronouns (AGP)?

- You can't always know what someone's AGP is by looking at them.
- Asking and correctly using someone's affirmed pronoun is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender identity.
- When someone is referred to with the wrong pronoun, it can make them feel disrespected, invalidated, or dismissed.
- You will be setting an example for your class. If you are consistent about using someone's preferred pronouns, they will follow your example. Many of your students will be learning about AGPs for the first time, so this will be a learning opportunity for them that they will keep forever.
- Discussing and correctly using AGPs sets a tone of respect that trans and gender non-conforming students do not take for granted. It can truly make all the difference,

especially for incoming first-year students that may feel particularly vulnerable, friendless, and scared.

How do I ask someone what their AGP is?

- Try asking: "What are your affirmed pronouns?" or "Which pronouns do you like to hear?" or "Can you remind me which pronouns you like for yourself?" or "How would you like to be referred to?" It can feel awkward at first, but it is not half as awkward as getting it wrong or making a hurtful assumption.
- If you are asking as part of an introduction exercise and you want to quickly explain what an AGP is, you can try something like this: "Tell us your name, where you come from, and your preferred pronoun. That means the pronoun with which you like to be referred. For example, I'm Xena, I'm from Amazon Island, and I like to be referred to by "she, her, and hers pronouns." So, you could say, 'she went to her car' if you were talking about me."

What if I make a mistake?

- It's okay! Everyone slips up from time to time. The best thing to do if you use the wrong pronoun for someone is to say something right away, like "Sorry, I meant *she*."

Taking an active role

- In your classes, you may hear one of your students using the wrong pronoun for someone. In most cases, it is appropriate to gently correct them without further embarrassing the individuals. This means saying something like "Actually, Xena prefers the pronoun *she*," and then moving on. If other students or faculty are consistently using the wrong pronouns for someone, do not ignore it. It is important to let the student know that you are their ally.
- It may be appropriate to approach them and say something like "I noticed that you were getting referred to with the wrong pronoun earlier, and that can be really hurtful. Would you be okay with me taking them aside and reminding them about your pronouns? I want to make sure that this group is a safe space for you." Follow up if necessary but take your cues from the comfort level of the student. Your actions will be greatly appreciated.

3. Ideas for Applying Strategic Language to Situations Involving Homophobic and Transphobic Remarks

We know that if we, as adults in school, allow slurs of any kind to pass without challenge, we run the risk of conveying acceptance and agreement with the nature of the slur. Worse still, silence gives tacit approval to judgmental, bigoted, or hateful thoughts behind the use of words.

Situation One: We hear homophobic or transphobic remarks with family members and colleagues.

We must acknowledge that many of us grew up in situations where put-downs of every type were "business as usual." We accepted stereotypes and used them as a source of humor and as a mark of camaraderie. So, our first challenge is to figure out how we can maintain a friendly, convivial connection with our friends and colleagues without making others the source of put-downs and without sounding "holier than thou." This is not an easy task, since

our friends are used to getting a laugh from us and experiencing the fun of a shared joke. We can start by not *initiating* humor that involves a stereotype or put-down. If we refuse to use put-down language in any way, shape, or form, even in the name of fun, we will go a long way towards changing the dynamics of the conversation, without making a "big deal" out of it. We can make a promise to abandon the use of slurs and put-down humor, regardless of type, in conversations with family, friends and colleagues, no matter what other people might say. If we simply refuse to laugh or respond in kind to a mean slur, or change the subject abruptly, perhaps we will alter the pattern of banter in the future.

Situation Two: Students use homophobic or transphobic remarks in conversation with us.

In a more active fashion, we can devise strategies to address put-down language. Our goal in potentially volatile conversations is to “connect before we correct.”

Gentle correction might be appropriate when the young person uses a homophobic or transphobic remark in casual conversation with you when there are no other students around. Using this type of language with you, an older authority figure, implies one of three things:

- 1) The student doesn't realize what the word means. Is repeating it because they have heard other people say it in a context where "gay" is viewed as synonymous with "non-athletic," "weak," or other unflattering but non-sexual, adjective;
- 2) The student assumes a comfortable "collegial" familiarity with you at that moment, and they believe you would accept the remark without challenging it; or
- 3) The student believes everybody uses the word.

This is a tricky situation. We don't want to break rapport with the student by assuming a command voice and correcting them in an authoritarian style, but it is important that we do not allow the remark to pass unchallenged.

Strategy: If a student uses offensive terms referencing another student or group:

- Interrupt the student.
- Make the point that you want to hear the story and are empathetic to the core content of the conversation, but that you want to hear it without the offensive term.
- Cite the new community standard that is developing without lecturing. Use the word “we.”
- It may be appropriate to mention that another person's sexual orientation is not a big deal to you. Then, get back to the conversation.
- Be low-key; don't over-react; make sure you address the slur.

Situation Three: You hear homophobic or transphobic remarks when passing by a group of students.

You might take advantage of this to spread a tolerance message. Make a brief comment and move on without creating a confrontation.

- *"Hey, I know you guys didn't mean for me to hear that, but I heard someone use the word 'gay' and it sounded like a put-down to me. Maybe that's not how you meant it...but we are trying to get away from all that stuff around here. Why don't you say something else, instead?"*

Situation Four: A student asks you about another person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

If a student has established a rapport with you, he or she might ask you your opinion about another person's sexual orientation. Whether the person asked about is a student or a staff member, you can use the opportunity to spread an acceptance message.

- *"I don't really know Mr. Jones' sexual orientation, but it wouldn't make a difference to me, one way or the other. Kids tell me he makes learning fun, and I don't know a harder-working guy on this campus. We need more enthusiastic teachers like him, wouldn't you agree?"*

Situation Five: You are intervening in a verbal confrontation where one student uses a homophobic slur towards another student.

The situation gets a bit trickier if the person targeted by the homophobic language is present to hear it, along with bystanders. Everyone will be watching your response to get clues as to whether that language is acceptable to you. While you might decide to pull the disputants away and mediate the problem in private, a public response to the use of the slur will give a message to the whole crowd that you will not tolerate that language.

- *"Put-downs never help solve problems. If you keep saying personal slurs like that you will be written up. Let's agree to stop using all put-downs. Now, what is this really all about?"*

Clearly, offensive terms that are universally known as hurtful slurs fall into a different category. Deliberate use of these offensive words is meant to taunt, intimidate, wound, or threaten others, and might require more intensive interventions.

Situation Six: A young person "comes out" to you.

If a young person feels comfortable enough with you to open about his or her sexual orientation, your response will be crucial.

If the person seems to be comfortable with their orientation or gender expansiveness and mentions to you that he or she is LGBTQ+ in passing as part of a conversation where that is NOT the primary content of the conversation, you might simply attend to the primary content of the conversation without referencing the person's revelation at all. By NOT highlighting it or returning to it, you convey your acceptance of the person as an individual who happens to be LGBTQ+.

If the student seems to be struggling with their revelation, and is "testing the waters" with you, then the general goal will be to show support and universalize and normalize the conversation. Direct people to sources of more information, if they want it, such as school counselors, social workers or school psychologists.

Situation Seven: The student asks directly for more information.

Our goal in conversation is to be helpful, and not pass along any sort of personal judgment. If someone asks for information, we will give them an answer if we know it or direct them to someone who might have more knowledge.

CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS

“COMING OUT”

Talking to Students

LGBTQ+ people have the right to decide when, and how, to reveal to others their sexual orientation or gender identity (or even the fact that they are questioning their orientation or identity). This is often a delicate and emotional process. LGBTQ+ youth commonly experience rejection by parents and others because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The degree to which teachers and administrators need to be sensitive about this issue, cannot be overstated.

If a Student Comes Out to You:

- Offer support.
- Be a role model of acceptance.
- Appreciate the student’s courage.
- Listen, listen, listen.
- Assure and respect confidentiality.
- Demonstrate understanding, acceptance, and compassion.
- Be prepared to give a referral for resources and/or for emotional support.
- Always act in the best interest of the student and their safety.

What Not to Say:

- “I knew it!”
- “Are you sure? Are you confused?”
- “This is just a phase.”
- “You just haven’t found the right woman/man.”
- “Shhhh, don’t tell anyone.”
- “You’re too young to know.”
- “You should come out to everyone and be honest.”
- “You can’t be gay, you’ve had relationships with people of the opposite sex.”

Talking to Parents/Guardians

Just as teachers and school administrators cannot discourage a student from being “out” at school, they also cannot encourage (or even force) a student to be “out” at home. It is up to the student to decide where and when to be open about his or her LGBTQ+ status.

Occasionally, a parent may contact teachers, school counselors, or administrators to ask if their child has confided in them about his/her sexual orientation, or if it is suspected their child may be gay. With the limited exception, involving the imminent fear of physical harm, it is never appropriate for school staff to divulge the sexual orientation of a student to a parent.

Remember, our responsibility is ensuring the safety and security of all students. Please contact a member of your Student Services Team for further assistance.

SAFE SPACE POSTERS/STICKERS

It only takes one person to make a potentially life-changing difference for a youth who is suffering. While there are many ways teachers and administrators can facilitate a safe environment for vulnerable LGBTQ+ students, one of the most widely recognized methods is by displaying a Safe Space poster or sticker. For additional resources, please also visit: <https://www.glsen.org/safespace> and GSANetwork.org.

By displaying a Safe Space sticker or poster in a hallway, in a classroom, or on a door, a teacher or administrator creates a visible and easily identifiable network of LGBTQ+ community members and allies. In other words, a teacher or administrator does not need to be LGBTQ+ to display the symbol. When a student sees this poster/sticker in a classroom or office, he or she can presume that teacher or administrator:

- is accepting of LGBTQ+ individuals
- has basic knowledge about issues of sexual orientation and gender identity
- is willing to provide resources and support

GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCES

Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) or similar Diversity Clubs are student clubs, allowing students with a common interest to get together and have events or discussions about that interest. GSAs are made up of students of any sexual orientation; in fact, many GSA members are straight-identifying youth. GSAs can be educational or civic clubs dedicated to making the school and community a safer space for all individuals.

Under the Federal Equal Access Act (20 U.S.C. §§ 4071-74), a public school permitting any non-curricular club (meaning, a club that does not directly relate to a class taught at school) must also allow students to form a GSA. In addition, according to the Equal Access Act, the school must treat the GSA the same as it does any other non-curricular club in terms of access to facilities, resources, and opportunities to advertise. See also School Board Policy 5730 (“Equal Access for Nondistrict-sponsored Student Clubs and Activities”).

The 2007, 2009, 2011, and 2013 National School Climate Surveys conducted by GLSEN found that students who had a GSA at their school reported hearing fewer homophobic remarks. The students surveyed experienced less harassment and assault because of their orientation and gender expression. In addition, they were more likely to report incidents of harassment and

assault, and were less likely to feel unsafe because of their orientation or gender expression. This was true regardless of whether the respondent joined the GSA club.

Parents may have questions about a GSA. Answer questions as honestly as possible, but be exceedingly careful not to accidentally “out” a student. Remember a student could be out at school, but NOT out at home. Furthermore, students have a legal right to privacy and confidentiality when it comes to their sexual orientation. Remind parents the club is a gay and straight alliance. Therefore, a student is not making any statement about his or her orientation or identity simply by participating in the club. Students interested starting a GSA, should speak with their school administrators.

PROMS/DANCES

Schools may set general dress standards for prom, such as the requirement of formal attire. A school must not dictate that only biological males may wear tuxedos, and only biological females may wear dresses.

DRESS CODE

Some students may want to wear gender-nonconforming attire to school, to the prom, to graduation ceremonies, or in yearbook photographs. It is best practice for school dress code and uniform policies to be gender-neutral and should not restrict students’ clothing choices on the basis of gender or traditional stereotypes about what males and females “should” wear. For example, schools may require formal attire for all students at a ceremony but may not specify that girls must wear dresses and boys must wear ties.

When faced with a potentially challenging question from an LGBTQ+ student, always ask yourself if your answer would be the same if it were a straight student. Be careful not to allow your personal views about orientation, gender identity, and gender expression to unfairly influence the result.

OUTSIDE MEDIA AND COMMUNITY COMMUNICATIONS

Media inquiries about issues related to gender identity should be referred to the PCSB Office of Strategic Communications. Rather than directly commenting on the issue, PCSB staff should direct inquiries from families or the immediate school community to the principal.



Each day, students walk through the doors of schools across Pinellas County filled with talent, dreams, and infinite potential. It is the responsibility of every staff member to provide an outstanding education that will empower students to grow their gifts and develop the skills they need to be successful. Dispelling harmful stereotypes and prejudices of all kinds create spaces where every student can learn and thrive. So is the case for our students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or gender nonconforming.

As a result, the needs of LGBTQ+ students and families must be acknowledged and addressed to the best of our ability as PCS staff. As educators, we have a professional, ethical, and legal obligation to address the unique needs of all students within our district. We also have a District Strategic Plan that highlights goals that will ensure our vision of 100% student success.

Pinellas County Schools does not achieve these goals by good-fortune or hard-work alone, but by aligning efforts and resources. Our strategic directions, encompassing seven strategic goals, guides the long-term work of Pinellas County Schools. These areas directly align with the District's vision, mission and core values and set the direction for the continuous improvement.

To ensure that all students are Learning in a Safe Environment, Strategic Goal 3 is to Develop and sustain a healthy, respectful, caring, safe learning environment for students, faculty, staff and community resulting in individual employee learning, student achievement and overall school improvement.

In order to provide Equity with Excellence for ALL students, Strategic Goal 4 requires that we provide equity and excellence of education by ensuring the needs of each and every student are known and met, in order to increase performance and reduce the disparity in graduation rates, proficiency scores on assessments, participation and performance in accelerated courses, disciplinary infractions and placement in Exceptional Student Education programs.

The Prevention Department will continue to provide support and resources as we work together to create a safe and supportive school environment for all students.



**PINELLAS
COUNTY
SCHOOLS**

Vision:

100% Student Success

Mission:

Educate and prepare each student
for college, career and life.

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