



City on a Hill Policy on Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity

All students need a safe and supportive school environment to progress academically and developmentally. Administrators, faculty, staff, and students each play an important part in creating and sustaining that environment. This policy is intended to help City on a Hill schools take steps to create a culture in which transgender and gender nonconforming students feel safe, supported, and fully included, and to meet each schools' obligation to provide equal educational opportunities for all students, in compliance with G.L. c. 76, §5 and other state regulations. This policy sets out general principles based on the law and addresses common issues regarding transgender and gender nonconforming students.

Definitions

Understanding the terminology associated with gender identity is important to providing a safe and supportive school environment for students whose rights are protected under the law. The following terms appear in this document and are defined to assist in understanding the policy presented. Although these are the most commonly used terms, students may prefer other terms to describe their gender identity, appearance, or behavior. The term "gender identity" is specifically defined in the Mass. General Laws, as amended by An Act Relative to Gender Identity (the gender identity law).

- **Gender expression:** the manner in which a person represents or expresses gender to others, often through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, activities, voice, or mannerisms.
- **Gender identity:** as defined in part at G.L. c. 4, § 7, is "a person's gender-related identity, appearance or behavior, whether or not that gender-related identity, appearance or behavior is different from that traditionally associated with the person's physiology or assigned sex at birth..."
- **Gender nonconforming:** a term used to describe people whose gender expression differs from stereotypic expectations. The terms "gender variant" or "gender atypical" are also used.
- **Transgender:** an umbrella term used to describe a person whose gender identity or gender expression is different from that traditionally associated with the assigned sex at birth.

The Law

The gender identity law amended G.L. c. 76, § 5, to establish that no person shall be excluded from or discriminated against in admission to a public school of any town, or in obtaining the advantages, privileges and courses of study of such public school on account of gender identity, among other characteristics. The amended Access to Equal Educational Opportunity regulations, 603 CMR 26.00, and the non-discrimination provision of the Charter School regulations, 603 CMR 1.00, require schools to establish policies and procedures, provide training, and implement and monitor practices to ensure that obstacles to equal access to school programs are removed for all students, including transgender and gender nonconforming students.

The gender identity law reflects the reality that transgender and gender nonconforming students are enrolled in Massachusetts public schools. These students, because of widespread misunderstanding and lack of knowledge about their lives, are at a higher risk for peer ostracism, victimization, and bullying. The 2011 National School Climate Survey by the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN), found that 75.4% of transgender students had been verbally harassed in the previous year, 32.1% had been physically harassed, and 16.8% had been physically assaulted. Educators play an essential role in advocating for the well-being of these students and creating a school culture that supports them.

Understanding Gender Identity

The gender identity law defines “gender identity” to mean “a person’s gender-related identity, appearance or behavior, whether or not that gender-related identity, appearance or behavior is different from that traditionally associated with the person’s physiology or assigned sex at birth.” The law also states that “[g]ender-related identity may be shown by providing evidence including, but not limited to, medical history, care or treatment of the gender-related identity, consistent and uniform assertion of the gender-related identity or any other evidence that the gender-related identity is sincerely held as part of a person’s core identity;”¹

Transgender youth are those whose assigned birth sex does not match their internalized sense of their gender (their “gender-related identity”), and gender nonconforming youth are those whose gender-related identity does not meet the stereotypically expected norms associated with their assigned sex at birth. A transgender boy, for example, is a youth who was assigned the sex of female at birth but has a clear and persistent identity as male. A transgender girl is a youth who was assigned the sex of male at birth but has a clear and persistent identity as female. Gender nonconforming youth range in the ways in which they identify as male, female, some combination of both, or neither.

The responsibility for determining a student’s gender identity rests with the student or, in the

¹ Mass. Gen. Laws. Ch. 4, § 7 (2012). 2 Id.

case of young students not yet able to advocate for themselves, with the parent.² One's gender identity is an innate, largely inflexible characteristic of each individual's personality that is generally established by age four, although the age at which individuals come to understand and express their gender identity may vary based on each person's social and familial social development.³ As a result, the person best situated to determine a student's gender identity is that student himself or herself, or themselves.

Consistent with the statutory standard, City on a Hill will accept a student's assertion of his or her gender identity when there is "consistent and uniform assertion of the gender-related identity, or any other evidence that the gender-related identity is sincerely held as part of a person's core identity." =

Confirmation of a student's asserted gender identity may include a letter from a parent, health care provider, school staff member familiar with the student (a teacher, guidance counselor, or school psychologist, among others), or other family members or friends. A letter from a social worker, doctor, nurse practitioner, or other health care provider stating that a student is being provided medical care or treatment relating to her/his gender identity is one form of confirmation of an asserted gender identity. It is not, however, the exclusive form upon which the school or student may rely. A letter from a clergy member, coach, family friend, or relative stating that the student has asked to be treated consistent with her/his asserted gender identity, or photographs at public events or family gatherings, are other potential forms of confirmation. These examples are intended to be illustrative rather than comprehensive.

Gender Transition

Many, though not all, transgender youth undergo the experience of gender transition. The term "gender transition" describes the experience by which a person goes from living and identifying as one gender to living and identifying as another. For most youth, and for all young children, the experience of gender transition involves no medical intervention. Rather, most transgender youth will undergo gender transition through a process commonly referred to as "social transition," whereby they begin to live and identify as the gender consistent with their gender-related identity. Some transgender youth who are close to reaching puberty, or after commencing puberty, may complement social transition with medical intervention that may include hormone suppressants, cross-gender hormone therapy, and, for a small number of young people, a range of gender-confirming surgeries. The decision about whether and how to undergo gender transition is personal and depends on the unique circumstances of each individual. There is no threshold medical or mental health diagnosis or treatment requirement that any student must meet in order to have his or her gender identity recognized and respected by City on a Hill.

² When used in this document, the term "parent" refers to parent as well as legal guardian.

³ See Gerald P. Mallon, "Practice with Transgendered Children," in *Social Services with Transgendered Youth* 49, 55-58 (Gerald P. Mallon ed., 1999). See also Stephanie Brill & Rachel Pepper, "Developmental Stages and the Transgender Child," in *The Transgender Child*, 61-64.

Some transgender and gender nonconforming students are not openly so at home for reasons such as safety concerns or lack of acceptance. City on a Hill personnel should speak with the student first before discussing a student's gender nonconformity or transgender status with the student's parent or guardian. For the same reasons, City on a Hill personnel should discuss with the student how the school should refer to the student, e.g., appropriate pronoun use, in written communication to the student's parent or guardian.⁴

Names and Pronouns

Transgender students often choose to change the name assigned to them at birth to a name that is associated with their gender identity. As with most other issues involved with creating a safe and supportive environment for transgender students, the best course is to engage the student with respect to name and pronoun use, and agree on a plan to initiate that name and pronoun use within City on a Hill. The plan also could include when and how this is communicated to students and their parents. In the case of a transgender student who is enrolling at City on a Hill, it is important that the school respect the student's privacy (see the following section) and chosen name.

When requested, City on a Hill will accurately record the student's chosen name on all records, whether or not the student, parent, or guardian provides the school with a court order formalizing a name change. These changes will also be reflected on the students State Assigned Student Identifiers (SASIDs). City on a Hill personnel should use the student's chosen name and pronouns appropriate to a student's gender identity, regardless of the student's assigned birth sex. For those students who have been attending a school and undergo gender transition while attending the same school, City on a Hill will work with the student, and where appropriate, the student's family, to develop a plan for initiating use of the chosen name and pronouns consistent with the student's gender identity.

Privacy, Confidentiality, and Student Records

Under state law, information about a student's assigned birth sex, name change for gender identity purposes, gender transition, medical or mental health treatment related to gender identity, or any other information of a similar nature, regardless of its form, is part of the individual's student record (see Massachusetts Student Records Regulations, 603 CMR 23.00), is confidential, and must be kept private and secure, except in limited circumstances. 603 CMR § 23.04.5 One circumstance is when authorized school personnel require the information to provide administrative, teaching, counseling, or other services to the student in the performance of their official duties. For transgender students, authorized school personnel could include individuals such as the principal, school nurse, classroom teacher(s), or guidance or adjustment counselor.

⁴ The federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 20 USC 1232g, also protects the privacy of education records and requires that personally identifiable information be kept secure and confidential.

When a student new to a school is using a chosen name, the birth name is considered private information and may be disclosed only with authorization as provided under the Massachusetts Student Records Regulations. If the student has previously been known at school or in school records by his or her birth name, the principal will direct school personnel to use the student's chosen name. Every effort will be made to update student records (for example, Individualized Education Programs) with the student's chosen name and not circulate records with the student's assigned birth name. Records with the student's assigned birth name should be kept in a separate, confidential file.

When determining which, if any, staff or students should be informed that a student's gender identity is different from the assigned birth sex, decisions should be made in consultation with the student, or in the case of a young student, the student's parent or guardian. The key question is whether and how sharing the information will benefit the student.

Transgender and gender nonconforming students may decide to discuss and express their gender identity openly and may decide when, with whom, and how much to share private information. A student who is 14 years of age or older, or who has entered the ninth grade, may consent to disclosure of information from his or her student record.

Gender Markers on Student Records

A gender marker is the designation on school and other records that indicates a student's gender. For most students, records that include an indication of a student's gender will reflect a student's assigned birth sex. For transgender students, however, a documented gender marker (for example, "male" or "female" on a permanent record) should reflect the student's gender identity, not the student's assigned sex. This means that if a transgender student whose gender identity is male has a school record that reflects an assigned birth sex as female, then upon request by the student or, in the case of young students not yet able to advocate for themselves, by the parent or guardian, the school should change the gender marker on the record to male. Massachusetts also recognizes a non-gendered pronoun that a student may choose to utilize.

In addition, transgender students who transition after having completed high school, may ask their previous schools to amend school records or a diploma or transcript that include the student's birth name and gender. When requested, and when satisfied with the gender identity information provided, schools should amend the student's record, including reissuing a high school diploma or transcript, to reflect the student's current name and gender.

Restrooms, Locker Rooms, and Changing Facilities

All students are entitled to have access to restrooms, locker rooms and changing facilities that are sanitary, safe, and adequate, so they can comfortably and fully engage in their school program and activities. In meeting with the transgender student (and parent) to discuss the issues set forth in this policy, it is essential to address the student's access to the restrooms,

locker room and changing facility. Each situation needs to be reviewed and addressed based on the particular circumstances of the student and the school facilities. In all cases, City on a Hill personnel should be clear with the student (and parent) that the student may access the restroom, locker room, and changing facility that corresponds to the student's gender identity. While some transgender students will want that arrangement, others will not be comfortable with it. City on a Hill will work with transgender students who are uncomfortable using a sex-segregated restroom to provide a safe and adequate alternative, such as a single "unisex" restroom or the nurse's restroom. Similarly, some transgender students may not be comfortable undressing in the changing facilities that correspond to the student's gender identity. Under those circumstance as well, City on a Hill will work with the student (and parent) to identify an adequate alternative.

Some students may feel uncomfortable with a transgender student using the same sex-segregated restroom, locker room or changing facility. This discomfort is not a reason to deny access to the transgender student. City on a Hill administrators and counseling staff should work with students to address the discomfort and to foster understanding of gender identity, to create a school culture that respects and values all students.

Physical Education Classes and Intramural and Interscholastic Athletic Activities

Physical education is a required course in all grades in Massachusetts' public schools, and school-based athletics are an important part of many students' lives. Where there are sex-segregated classes or athletic activities, including intramural and interscholastic athletics, all students must be allowed to participate in a manner consistent with their gender identity. With respect to interscholastic athletics, the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association will rely on the gender determination made by the student's district; it will not make separate gender identity determinations.

Other Gender-Based Activities, Rules, Policies, and Practices

Whenever students are separated by gender in school activities or are subject to an otherwise lawful gender-specific rule, policy, or practice, students must be permitted to participate in such activities or conform to such rule, policy, or practice consistent with their gender identity.