gender spectrum

Gender Inclusive Schools Toolkit

Creating a school that acknowledges and affirms the gender diversity of every student does not happen by accident. Through thoughtful and intentional practices, any institution can create gender inclusive conditions for all of its students. The following materials are designed to set a tone that demonstrates your commitment to making sure every student's gender is recognized and accepted. For additional resources, please visit our website at www.genderspectrum.org.

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
- o *Ideas and expectations about gender are changing all of the time.*
- o *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

Understanding Gender

Understandings of gender continually evolve. In the course of a person's life, the interests, activities, clothing and professions that are considered the domain of one gender or another evolve in ways both small and large. This has perhaps never been more true than it is now. The data show that today's young people have significantly different understandings of gender than previous generations, with consequences for all children, families, organizations and institutions. For example:

- A 2015 Fusion Millennial poll of adults ages 18-34 in the USA found that the majority see gender as a spectrum, rather than a man/woman binary.[i]
- A 2017 Harris Poll of millennials found that 12% identify as transgender or gender non-conforming.[ii]
- Research by J. Walter Thompson Intelligence (the research arm of the global marketing communications company) found that 56% of those aged 13-20 know someone who uses gender-neutral pronouns (such as they/them).[iii]
- Leading businesses are beginning to change traditional gender-based marketing of products, such as removing "pink and blue" clothing and toy aisles.[iv]

All of us are inundated with gender messages from the time we are born, yet we offer children few opportunities to more deeply consider or understand this fundamentally important aspect of life. Basic gender literacy is essential for children to understand their own gender, engage in healthy relationships, identify and place media and social messages in context, and have agency in determining aspects of their gender now and in the future. Societal ideas about gender will affect every critical aspect of their lives, from education to career, finances, relationships and more.

Dimensions of Gender

People tend to use the terms "sex" and "gender" interchangeably. But, while connected, the two terms are not equivalent. Generally, we assign a newborn's sex as either male or female (some US states and other countries offer a third option) based on the baby's genitals. Once a sex is assigned, we presume the child's gender. For some people, this is cause for little, if any, concern or further thought because their gender aligns with gender-related ideas and assumptions associated with their sex.

Nevertheless, while gender may begin with the assignment of our sex, it doesn't end there. A person's gender is the complex interrelationship between three dimensions:

- **Body**: our body, our experience of our own body, how society genders bodies, and how others interact with us based on our body.

- **Identity**: our deeply held, internal sense of self as masculine, feminine, a blend of both, neither, or something else. Identity also includes the name we use to convey our gender. Gender identity can correspond to or differ from the sex we are assigned at birth.

- **Social**: how we present our gender in the world and how society, culture, community, and family perceive, interact with, and try to shape our gender. The social dimension is also related to gender roles and how society uses those roles to try to enforce conformity to current gender norms.

Each of these dimensions can vary greatly across a range of possibilities and is distinct from, but interrelated with, the others. A person's comfort in their gender is related to the degree to which these three dimensions feel in harmony. Let's explore each of these dimensions in a little more detail.

Body
Most societies view sex as a binary concept, with two rigidly fixed options: male or female, based on a person's reproductive anatomy and functions. But a binary view of sex fails to capture even the biological aspect of gender. While we are often taught that bodies have one of two forms of genitalia, which are classified as "female" or "male," there are naturally occurring intersex conditions (associated with genitals, sex chromosomes, gonads, hormones, reproductive structures) that demonstrate that sex exists across a continuum of possibilities. This biological spectrum by itself should be enough to dispel the simplistic notion that there are just two sexes. The relationship between a person's gender and their body goes beyond one's reproductive functions. Research in neurology, endocrinology, and cellular biology points to a broader biological basis for an individual's experience of gender. In fact, research increasingly points to our brains as playing a key role in how we each experience our gender.[v]

Bodies themselves are also gendered in the context of cultural expectations. Masculinity and femininity are equated with certain physical attributes, labeling us as more or less a man/woman based on the degree to which those attributes are present. This gendering of our bodies affects how we feel about ourselves and how others perceive and interact with us.

Identity
Gender identity is our internal experience and our naming of our gender. Gender identity can correspond to or differ from norms associated with the sex we are assigned at birth.

Understanding of our gender comes to most of us fairly early in life. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, "By age four, most children have a stable sense of their gender identity."[vi] This core aspect of one's identity comes from within each of us. Gender identity is an inherent aspect of a person's make-up. Individuals do not choose their gender, nor can they be made to change it. However, the words someone uses to communicate their gender identity may change over time; naming one's gender can be a complex and evolving matter. Because we are provided with limited language for gender, it may take a person quite some time to discover, or create, the language that best communicates their internal experience. Likewise, as language evolves, a person's name for their gender may also evolve. This does not mean their gender has changed, but rather that the words for it are shifting.

The two gender identities most people are familiar with are boy and girl (or man and woman), and often people think that these are the only two gender identities. This idea that there are only two genders--and that each individual must be either one or the other--is called the "gender binary." However, throughout human history we know that many societies have seen, and continue to see, gender as a spectrum, and

not limited to just two possibilities. In addition to these two identities, other identities are now commonplace.

Youth and young adults today no longer feel bound by the gender binary, instead establishing a growing vocabulary for gender. More than just a series of new words, however, this shift in language represents a far more nuanced understanding of the experience of gender itself. Terms that communicate the broad range of experiences of non-binary people are particularly growing in number. Genderqueer, a term that is used both as an identity and as an umbrella term for non-binary identities, is one example of a term for those who do not identify as exclusively masculine or feminine. This evolution of language is exciting, but can also be confusing as new terms are created regularly, and since what a term means can vary from person to person. For further information on specific identities and what they commonly mean, please see *The Language of Gender*

Social

The social dimension constitutes the third component of gender. It includes the ways we show our gender to the world, through such things as clothing, hairstyles, and mannerisms. Practically everything is assigned a gender—toys, colors and clothes are some of the more obvious examples. Given the prevalence of the gender binary, children face great pressure to express their gender within narrow, stereotypical definitions of "masculine" or "feminine." Social expectations around gender are taught to us from the moment we are born, and communicated through every aspect of our lives, including family, culture, peers, schools, community, media, and religion. Gender roles and expectations are so entrenched in our culture that it's difficult to imagine things any other way.

Through a combination of social conditioning and personal preference, by age three most children prefer activities and exhibit behaviors typically associated with their assigned gender.[vii] For individuals who fit fairly neatly into expected gender roles and expression, there may be little cause to think about, or question, their gender.

However, children who present gender outside of these social norms often have a very different experience. Girls thought to be too masculine and boys seen as feminine face a variety of challenges. Pressures to conform at home, mistreatment by peers in school, and condemnation by the broader society are just some of the difficulties facing a child whose expression does not fall in line with the binary gender system.

Because social expectations around gender are so rigid, we frequently assume that what someone wears, or how they move, talk, or express themselves, tells us something about their gender identity. But how we present our gender is distinct from identity--we can't assume a person's gender identity based on their gender presentation. For example, a boy may like to wear skirts or dresses. His choice in clothing doesn't change his gender identity; it simply means that he prefers (at least some of the time) to wear clothes that society has typically associated with girls.

What 's more, social norms around gender change across societies and over time. One need only consider men wearing earrings or women having tattoos to see the flexibility of social expectations about gender. Even the seemingly intractable notion that "pink is for girls, blue is for boys" is relatively new.

Prior to the mid-twentieth century, pink was associated with boys' clothing and blue with girls' clothing (still due to the gendering of colors, but with a different rationale associating each color with particular gendered characteristics).[viii]

Congruence

Gender congruence is the feeling of harmony in our gender:

- experiencing comfort in our body as it relates to our gender;
- naming of our gender that adequately corresponds with our internal sense of who we are;
- presenting our gender through clothing, mannerisms, interests and activities;
- being seen consistently by others as we see ourselves.

Finding congruence is an ongoing process throughout each of our lives as we continue to grow and gain insight into ourselves. It is most often found through exploration. For some, finding congruence is fairly simple; for others, it is a much more complex process. But the fundamental need to find gender congruence is true for us all, and any degree to which we don't experience it can be distressing.

"Transitioning" is a term commonly used to refer to the steps a transgender, agender, or non-binary person takes in order to find congruence in their gender. But this term can be misleading as it implies that the person's gender identity is changing and that there is a moment in time when this takes place. More typically, it is others' understanding of the person's gender that shifts. What people see as a "transition" is actually an alignment in one or more dimensions of the individual's gender as they seek congruence across those dimensions. A transition is taking place, but it is often other people (parents and other family members, support professionals, employers, etc.) who are transitioning in how they see the individual's gender, and not the person themselves. For the person, these changes are often less of a transition and more of an evolution.

Instead of "transitioning," a more apt phrase is "seeking congruence." A person can work to bring the dimensions of gender into harmony in many ways:

Social congruence measures: changes of social identifiers such as clothing, hairstyle, gender identity, name and/or pronouns;

Hormonal congruence measures: the use of medical approaches such as hormone "blockers" or hormone therapy to promote physical, mental, and/or emotional alignment;

Surgical congruence measures: the addition, removal, or modification of gender-related physical traits; and

Legal congruence measures: changing identification documents such as one's birth certificate, driver's license, or passport.

It's important to note, though, that a transition experience can be a very significant event in a person's life. A public declaration of some kind where an individual communicates to others that aspects of themselves are different than others have assumed, and that they are now living consistently with who they know themselves to be, can be an empowering and liberating experience (and moving to those who get to share that moment with them). Oftentimes during a transition experience a person will announce a

change in the name and pronouns that they use and ask that others use their new name and pronouns going forward. Honoring this request is a sign of respect and a critically important way to demonstrate support.

Personal Gender

While the dimensions of gender and the desire for congruence are common to us all, ultimately gender is personal. Each dimension of gender is informed by our unique intersection of identities, experiences, and personal characteristics. We are more than our body, gender identity and social experience: we are also our race, ethnicity, class, faith, sense of geographic place, family history, and more. Our gender is personal because, while we share some of these aspects of self with others, the way that all of these identities, influences and characteristics come together is unique to each of us.

Gender Is Different Than Sexual Orientation

One final distinction to make is the difference between gender and sexual orientation, which are often incorrectly conflated. In actuality, gender and sexual orientation are two distinct, but related, aspects of self. Gender is personal (how we see ourselves), while sexual orientation is interpersonal (who we are physically, emotionally and/or romantically attracted to).

Why is it so critical to distinguish between these two concepts? When we confuse gender with sexual orientation, we are likely to make assumptions about a young person that have nothing to do with who they are. For example, when someone's gender presentation is inconsistent with others' expectations, assumptions are frequently made about that person's sexual orientation. The boy who loves to play princess is assumed to be gay, and the girl who buys clothes in the "boys'" section and favors a short haircut may be assumed to be a lesbian. These could be faulty conclusions. What someone wears and how they act is about their presentation of gender. You cannot tell what a person's sexual orientation is by what they have on (for that matter, you can't know what their gender identity is, either … unless they tell you).

Our society's conflation of gender and sexual orientation can also interfere with a young person's ability to understand and articulate aspects of their own gender. For example, it's not uncommon for a transgender or non-binary youth to wonder if they are gay or lesbian (or any sexual orientation other than heterosexual) before coming to a fuller realization of their gender identity. How we come to understand our gender and our sexual orientation – and the choices we make to disclose and express these parts of ourselves – are distinct paths. Thinking of these two aspects of self as interchangeable may, instead of helping us know ourselves and one another better, actually get in the way of understanding and communication.

What's Next?

There is a generational divide in how we think about gender. In order to bridge this gap, those of us who were raised with a more limited view of gender can take this as an opportunity to explore gender with

new eyes, to read and ask questions to better understand gender's complexity. As with any learning experience, you'll learn more about the world around you and about yourself in the process.

Gender diversity has existed throughout history and all over the world. As one of the most fundamental aspects of a person's identity, gender deeply influences every part of one's life. Where this crucial aspect of self is narrowly defined and rigidly enforced, individuals who exist outside of its norms face innumerable challenges. Even those who vary only slightly from norms can become targets of disapproval, discrimination, and even violence.

This does not have to be the case. Through a thoughtful consideration of the uniqueness and validity of every person's experience of self, we can develop greater acceptance for all. Not only will this create greater inclusion for individuals who challenge the norms of gender, it will create space for all individuals to more fully explore and express who they are.

---

[i] Benenson Strategy Group (2015) *Survey of Millennials*. Report to Fusion.net

[ii] GLAAD/Harris (2017) *Accelerating Acceptance.* Retrieved on January 23, 2019 from http://www.glaad.org/files/aa/2017_GLAAD_Accelerating_Acceptance.pdf

[iii] J Walter Thompson Intelligence Report (2016) "Generation Z Goes Beyond Gender Binaries in New Innovation Group Data". Retrieved on September 15, 2018 from https://www.jwtintelligence.com/2016/03/gen-z-goes-beyond-gender-binaries-in-new-innovation-group-data/

[iv] Tabuchi, H. (2015) "Sweeping Away Gender-Specific Toys and Labels". *The New York Times.* Retrieved on January 23, 2019 from https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/28/business/sweeping-away-gender-specific-toys-and-labels.html

[v] Joel, D et al. (2015) "Sex beyond the genitalia: The human brain mosaic". *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* Dec 2015, 112 (50) 15468-15473

[vi] Rafferty, J. (2015) *Gender Identity Development in Children.* American Academy of Pediatrics. Retrieved on January 14, 2019 from https://healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/Pages/Gender-Identity-and-Gender-Confusion-In-Children.aspx

[vii] Rafferty, J. (2015) *Gender Identity Development in Children.* American Academy of Pediatrics. Retrieved on January 14, 2019 from https://healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/Pages/Gender-Identity-and-Gender-Confusion-In-Children.aspx

[viii] Maglaty, J. (2017) "When Did Girls Start Wearing Pink?" *The Smithsonian Magazine*. Retrieved on January 23 from https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/when-did-girls-start-wearing-pink-1370097/

GET THE FACTS ABOUT TRANS YOUTH

an infographic presented by

MAP movement advancement project ▶   **BIDEN** FOUNDATION   **gender spectrum**

Who is transgender?

Transgender people are those who know themselves to be one gender, but who were labeled a different gender at birth.

For example, a child who was thought to be a girl but knows himself to be a boy might call himself transgender.

How many kids are transgender?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), almost 2% of high school students identify as transgender.[a] Applied to all youth, this means there are at least:

1.3 million+ trans youth (ages 0-17)

WHY IS FAMILY ACCEPTANCE SO IMPORTANT?

Research shows that trans youth with supportive families experience:

52% decrease in recent suicidal thoughts[b]

46% decrease in suicide attempts[b]

Significant increases in self-esteem and general health[b]

But only **27%** of trans youth say their families are very supportive.[c]

Fewer than half (43%) say they have an adult in their family they could turn to if they felt sad or worried.[c]

HOW CAN FAMILIES SUPPORT THEIR TRANS CHILD?

Expressing love and support for trans youth, including:
- respecting their chosen name and correct pronouns.
- allowing them to choose their clothes and hair style.
- allowing them to choose their toys and activities.

This helps children know there are adults who love and support them—especially important for when they experience negative reactions outside the family.[d]

Preventing trans youth from seeing other trans youth or participating in related activities can increase isolation and risk factors.[d] Therefore, this should be avoided.

GET THE FACTS ABOUT TRANS YOUTH

an infographic presented by

MAP movement advancement project ▶   **BIDEN** FOUNDATION   **gender spectrum**

MANY TRANS YOUTH EXPERIENCE DISCRIMINATION IN THEIR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

Only **9%** of trans youth say their communities are very accepting.[c]

Only **8%** of trans youth say their place of worship is very accepting.[c]

80% of transgender students said they'd avoided bathrooms because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.

64% of transgender students avoided gym class because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.

59% of transgender students had been required to use a bathroom that did not match the gender they live every day.

Only **12%** of trans youth say their school or district has official policies support trans students.[e]

HOW CAN SCHOOLS & COMMUNITIES SUPPORT TRANS YOUTH?

Teachers and staff should model inclusive behavior, including respecting chosen names and correct pronouns, as well as incorporating age-appropriate representation of LGBT people and history into curriculum.

Schools should ensure trans kids can participate in school activities and teams consistent with their gender identity.

Gender and sexualities alliances (GSAs, also called gay-straight alliances) and similar community organizations can support LGBTQ youth and even reduce the harmful impacts of bullying.[f]

Libraries should include books and resources for all ages that represent trans and gender diverse youth and people.

Faith communities should make their support of trans and LGB youth clear, use inclusive language, and work alongside local trans advocates and youth to create affirming communities.

Service providers, such as health care professionals and child welfare workers, should educate themselves on best practices for supporting and advocating for trans youth and their needs.

Inclusive Policies Make a Difference for Transgender Students

Transgender students in schools with supportive policies are less likely to miss school due to feeling unsafe, and they are more likely to feel greater belonging to their school communities. Yet only 12% of transgender and gender diverse students reported that their school or district had official policies or guidelines supporting transgender or gender diverse students.[e]

Sources: (a) Michelle Johns, Richard Lowry, Jack Andrzejewski, et al. Jan 25, 2019. "Transgender Identity and Experiences of Violence Victimization, Substance Use, Suicide Risk, and Sexual Risk Behaviors Among High School Students — 19 States and Large Urban School Districts, 2017." MMWR 68:67–71. Trans youth estimate based on 2010 U.S. Census estimate of 74.2 million U.S. residents under age 18; (b) Caitlin Ryan, Stephen Russell, David Huebner, Rafael Diaz, & Jorge Sanchez. 2010. "Family Acceptance in Adolescence and the Health of LGBT Young Adults." Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing 23(4): 2015-213. Comparing youth in high-acceptance families to low-acceptance families (Table 1); (c) Gender Spectrum & HRC's 2014 "Supporting and Caring for Our Gender Expansive Youth"; (d) Gender Spectrum's "Affirming vs. Non-Affirming Parenting Behaviors"; (e) Joseph Kosciw, Emily Greytak, Adrian Zongrone, Caitlin Clark, & Nhan L. Truong. 2018. "The 2017 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools." Washington, D.C.: GLSEN; (f) Russell Toomey, Caitlin Ryan, Rafael Diaz, & Stephen Russell. 2011. "High School Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) and Young Adult Well-Being: An Examination of GSA Presence, Participation, and Perceived Effectiveness." Applied Developmental Science 15(4): 175-185.

My Gender Journey

As professionals working with families and their children, there is a unique and influential role to be played in helping create the conditions where young people can be safe in authentically expressing and identifying their gender. By embracing the richness of the gender spectrum, professionals working with kids can help to broaden their own as well as children's understandings of gender, and in so doing, help every child feel seen, safe and supported. An important part of that work is to consider one's own experiences, messages, and beliefs about gender, both growing up as well as in your professional role.

Spend a few minutes looking over and answering the following questions. Write your answers down, and hang on to them. You may find it interesting to revisit your reflections at some point in the future, after you have had a chance to learn more about gender through training and your own reflections. Know that there are no "right" answers; each of us comes by our own understandings of gender in a unique context. Messages and traditions associated with gender are complex reflections of society, family, culture, race, religion, community and other socializing forces. Use this opportunity to pause, and examine your own gender history.

The exercise is divided into two parts: the first asks you to think about your own personal experiences with gender, while the second looks at your professional experiences.

My Personal Gender Journey   **Today's Date:**

1. Growing up, did you think of yourself as a boy, a girl, both, neither or in some other way? How did you come to that recognition? When?

2. What messages did you receive from those around you about gender? Did those messages make sense to you?

3. What's your first memory of gender defining or impacting your life?

4. How were kids who did not fit into expectations about gender treated by others (teachers, family, faith community, etc.)? By you?

5. How have your race, ethnicity, faith, class, community/sense of place influenced your gender?

6. How would you describe your gender in each of the three dimensions?
    a. Body:

    b. Identity:

    c. Social:

REV 082719

7. What did congruence look like for you as a child? And now as an adult? How has congruence evolved for you over time?

8. Do you remember a time when choosing gender congruence cost you something important, or benefitted you in some way?

9. Are there conscious choices you have made to live more congruently? Are there times you have chosen not to? If so, why?

10. If your gender (mostly) fits societal norms, how do you imagine it would feel if the ways you experience congruence were suddenly outside the norm? If your gender (mostly) doesn't fit societal norms, how do you imagine it would feel if your gender was the norm?

My Professional Gender Journey

1. How have issues of gender and gender diversity "shown up" in your own work?

2. What training have you received about gender, gender diversity, and/or gender inclusive practices?

3. What is your own comfort level with discussing issues of gender diversity with:

   Colleagues?_____

   Parents? _____

   Children/Youth?_____

4. Based on your personal and your professional journeys, how do you believe that your own previous experiences with gender influence the work you do? Are there ways in which those experiences enhance your ability to create greater gender inclusiveness? Are there ways in which those experiences inhibit your ability to do so? How so?

5. Do you have any final reflections about documenting your gender journey? Are there any goals you wish to set for yourself, personally? Professionally?

Creating Gender Inclusive Policy and Mission Statements

A powerful example of an institutional approach to creating a more gender inclusive school or institution is to formally declare your intentions though various public facing statements. Whether stated on a website, included in hiring materials or program descriptions or posted publicly, these affirmations are a strong indicator of your commitment to truly recognize and account for the unique gender of every person you serve.

Generic Anti-discrimination Language

We do not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, disability, gender identity, or gender expression.

Enhanced Enumeration (including dimensions of gender)

_____ is committed to providing an environment within which all employees, faculty, students, volunteers and others are treated with respect and that is free of harassment. _____ prohibits conduct that is disrespectful, disparaging or unprofessional as well as harassment based on race, color, national origin or ancestry, religious creed, age, pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions, marital or family status, assigned sex, gender (including gender identity and gender expression), sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, medical condition, genetic information or any other basis protected by federal or state law.

Affirmative Statement Regarding Gender Diversity

Gender is complex and unique to each of us. Involving more than just girls versus boys, we affirm youth of all genders—cisgender, transgender, non-binary, gender fluid, agender and any other genuinely held gender identity. We are not "gender neutral" or "gender blind;" rather we seek to acknowledge the individual journey of every student as they explore their own gender. We're working towards a world that recognizes and celebrates the unique gender of every member of our community.

maligayang pagdating

वेलकम 환영

hoan nghênh

Добро пожаловать

欢迎 bienvenidx

all genders welcome

powitanie ᎣᏏᏲ willkommen

ברוך הבא καλωσόρισμα ترحيب

ยินดีต้อนรับ benvenuto ようこそ bienvenue

genderspectrum

BE YOURSELF
CHANGE THE WORLD

genderspectrum

boy
girl
both
neither

gender**spectrum**

CELEBRATE
GENDER EXPANSIVE
YOUTH

genderspectrum
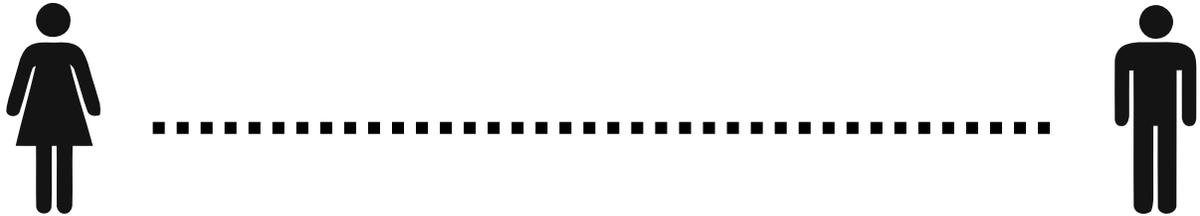
The binary Gender System is <u>two</u> limiting

genderspectrum

THINK **OUTSIDE** THE BOXES

genderspectrum
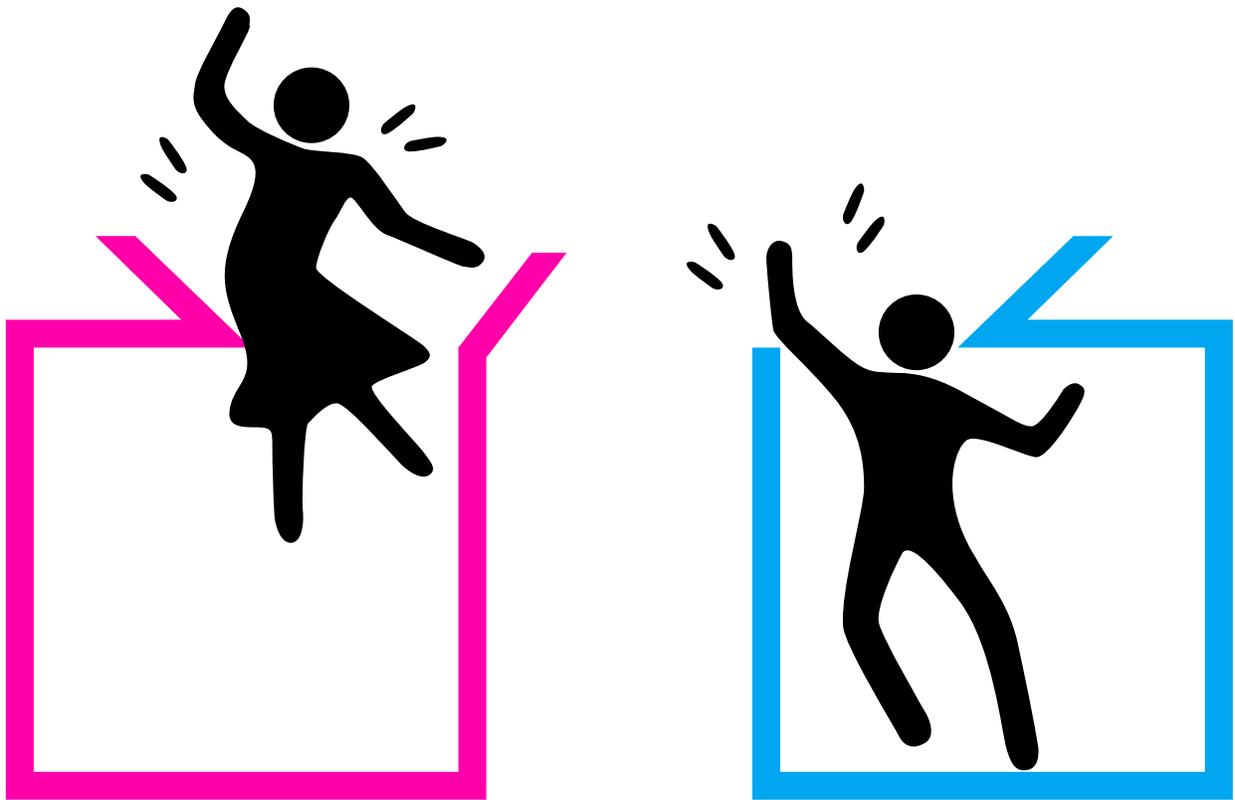
Gender and Student Information Systems

One of the most high-stakes issues for transgender students at school is whether their name and gender marker accurately reflect their affirmed gender in the student information system. When it does, it is a powerful demonstration of the school's commitment to honoring the student's identity. When it does not, at best, it is continual denial of the young person's authentic self; at worst, it potentially betrays their privacy and endangers their safety.

Processes like enrollment, taking attendance, assigning grades and communicating with parents and caregivers can all easily compromise the student's privacy and undermine an otherwise supportive school environment. For example, a substitute teacher simply calling out names from the attendance sheet, which typically lists each student's birth certificate name, can inadvertently disclose the student's transgender identity to their peers. Other typical stumbling points include after-school programs, school photos, outside professionals providing a service on campus, yearbooks, ID cards, posted lists, library cards, lunch cards, distribution of texts or other school supplies and standardized tests. Even in the most supportive of school settings, simple bureaucratic oversights can cause real trauma for a transgender student.

> A school's recordkeeping and reporting requirements do not exempt it from its obligations to safeguard student privacy and create a safe and supportive environment. Those obligations co-exist and schools must find a way to harmonize them.
>
> *Schools in Transition: A Guide for Supporting Transgender Students in K-12 Schools*

For schools, this can be a difficult tightrope to navigate. Often facing apparently inflexible requirements for maintaining "mandatory permanent pupil records," yet responsible for protecting a student's privacy, school officials often feel caught between the proverbial rock and hard place. However, while a schools' recordkeeping and reporting requirements are often seen as a barrier to preventing those oversights, many school districts have found solutions that allow them to comply with those requirements while meeting their obligations to safeguard a transgender student's privacy and right to learn in a safe and supportive school environment.

The following are some examples of those solutions. This is by no means an exhaustive list and the viability of these solutions in any school depends on a variety of factors, including each state's legal requirements for recordkeeping and student information systems. A school's recordkeeping and reporting requirements do not exempt it from its obligation to safeguard student privacy and create a safe and supportive environment. Those obligations co-exist and schools must find a way to harmonize them. Examples of solutions include:

- Maintain a copy of the student's birth certificate or other identity document that reflects the student's name and sex as assigned at birth under lock and key in the principal's office, while the student information system has the name and gender marker that correspond to the student's gender identity. In the student's cumulative file, include a note indicating that this student's record is confidential and how to access it (see below for example).
- Allow the student to re-enroll in the school using a passport with the correct name and gender marker, or change the name and gender marker in the student information system to be consistent with the passport. If a student is a U.S. citizen and their family can afford the

passport application fees, obtaining a passport that reflects the student's gender identity is usually easier than changing that information on their birth certificate.

- Use the student's chosen name and gender in the student information system, but switch it to the student's legal name and gender just before uploading the information to the state department of education's database. Schools that choose this approach pull that student's testing booklet before it is distributed and correct the name and gender marker on the label to ensure that the student's privacy and identity are respected.
- Create a uniform and public procedure at the district level that connects all electronic student databases and allows a student or their parent to fill out one form indicating the name and pronoun the student wishes to use. Some school districts have established such procedures to streamline the process and reduce the common bureaucratic barriers.
- Work with the student information system provider to develop a field or screen that would allow the district to maintain the student's legal and chosen name, but that would use the chosen name to populate attendance sheets, report cards, and other school-related documents.

It is important to note that transgender youth can experience many obstacles to correcting their identity documents. From the high cost of obtaining a court-ordered name change to states requiring transition-related surgery before correcting the gender marker on a birth certificate, barriers prevent students — particularly those in earlier grades — from obtaining identity documents that reflect their true selves. Consequently, school and district personnel must develop policies and protocols for inputting the correct information into the student information system regardless of the student's legal name or gender marker.

Sample Cumulative File Insert

[Date]

To Whom It May Concern,

I have reviewed the cumulative enrollment file for _____ and acknowledge that the site file is incomplete, but assert that all of the necessary documents for enrollment are appropriate and accounted for. Please direct any questions to [name/role/contact information] should you require access to this student's record.

Thank you,

[Name]
[Role]

cc.   Educational Services File
        Parent

Gender Inclusive Registration Forms (guardian)

_____ School is committed to recognizing the rich diversity of our students. If you have any questions about any of the information we are collecting, please don't hesitate to discuss with us.

First Name Child Uses: _____

Child's First Name on Birth Certificate:_____   ____Decline to state

Child's Gender: ____Decline to state _____Girl _____Boy _____Another gender (please share, below)

_____

Pronoun child uses: ___She ___He ___They ___ Another pronoun: _____

Child's sex on birth certificate: _____Female _____Male _____Intersex /Other ____Decline to state
(see below if you wish to share details)

Is there anything about your child's gender or sex that you would like for us to know? If you prefer to share this information privately, attach a separate note or we can set up a time to discuss with you in person. Please know that _____ school considers this private and confidential information that will only be shared with your expressed permission and guidance.

_____

_____

_____

_____

gender spectrum

Gender Inclusive Registration Forms (student)

_____ School is committed to recognizing the rich diversity of our students. If you have any questions about any of the information we are collecting, please don't hesitate to discuss with us.

Name You Use: _____

First Name on Birth Certificate: _____   ____Decline to state

Gender: ____Decline to state _____Girl _____Boy _____ Another gender (please share your gender, below)

_____

Pronoun you use: ___She ___He ___They ___ Another pronoun: _____

Sex listed on your birth certificate: _____Female _____Male _____Intersex /Other ____Decline to state (see below if you wish to share details)

Is there anything about your gender or sex that you would like for us to know? If you prefer to share this information privately, attach a separate note or we can set up a time to discuss with you in person. Please know that _____ school considers this private and confidential information that will only be shared with your expressed permission and guidance.

_____

_____

_____

_____

Things Anyone Can Do Tomorrow…

- Seek out and use the name and pronouns a student uses, regardless of what is written on their birth certificate
- Invite ALL students to share the name and/or pronoun they use (especially early in the year)
- Put up signs that recognize and affirm gender diversity
  - All Genders Welcome*
  - Celebrate Gender Expansive Youth*
  - Think Outside the Boxes*
  - Boy, Girl, Both, Neither*
- Post pictures depicting gender-expansive individuals or cultures in which gender is expressed differently than typically represented by traditionally binary notions
  - "Two spirited" individuals found in many First Nation communities
  - The Hijra of India
  - Arab men holding hands
- Display examples of people doing things not traditionally seen for their gender
  - Male nurses, childcare providers and dancers
  - Female soldiers, auto mechanics, and athletes
- Don't divide kids into boy and girl groups
  - Use birthdates, dogs and cats, winter or summer, chocolate or strawberry
  - Avoid arranging students boy/girl/boy/girl
  - Be mindful of <u>always</u> reinforcing the gender binary. At least sometimes say things like "attention scientists," "listen up Cougars," or "folks" rather than "ladies and gentlemen" or "boys and girls."
- Introduce language that is not all or nothing such as "sometimes, but not always," or "more common and less common," or "more frequent and less frequent"
- Say things like "all genders " or "boys, girls, both or neither" or "gender-expansive"
- Share examples of gender's impact on you or what you've learned about it over the years
- When binary statements about gender are made, interrupt them by asking questions like "is that always true?" or "can anyone think of an example that does not fit the pattern?"
- Respond to gender-based putdowns firmly, but instructionally, always being careful about further marginalizing the target of the statements. Follow up privately to see if how you handled the situation was comfortable for the student involved.

Integrating gender diversity into everyday curriculum…

Language Arts/Writing
Personal narrative writing prompts: A time when someone talked about my gender and the things I could or could not do. When someone confused my gender/When I confused someone's gender.
Persuasive essay writing prompts: Girls should not be allowed to play on the football team
Expository writing prompts: Describe the ways in which portrayals of gender in the media have affected our society's understandings of gender. Describe ways that gender is marketed to kids
Reading comprehension: use a short piece like "*The Dimensions of Gender*" and have students answer questions about content
Responding to literature: Various young adult reading titles* raise topics related to gender diversity, roles and stereotypes

Grammar & Spelling: Correct any of the mistakes in the following sentence. *Alex and shannon, were discussing the auditions for the school play when both girls was starteled by the loud noise?*
"The word is 'Extract.' Denise was trying to extract the doll from her brother's firm grip. Extract"

Social Studies/History
Studying Native Americans, include two-spirit individuals
Historical figures who have challenged traditional notions about gender
What are some of the ways gender is understood in different cultures?
What is the relationship between gender and issues of power in our society?

Science
Fact of the day: did you know there are species of geckos that only have "female" bodies?
The Biology of Gender*
Genetics
Sexual Health Education

Mathematics
Sample problems:
- 12 boys, 10 girls and 2 gender-expansive kids (feel like both or a blend) are in the math club. What is the ratio of boys to girls? Girls to gender-expansive?
- A survey was conducted recently. 373 students identified as male, 396 identified a female, 13 identified as transgender, and 27 identified as other. Graph these results. What percentage of the students identified as male? Female? Transgender? What percentage did not identify as either male or female?

Data and Statistics: Why is it difficult to come up with solid statistics about people who don't identify as male or female?

The Arts
Various projects where students have to portray something using the lens of gender
Allow students to play any part in various theater productions, rather than basing on gender
Discuss how certain dances have "male" and "female" parts. Why might that be challenging for some people?
Songs celebrating gender diversity

Foreign language
If the language is particularly gendered, distinguish between the rules of a language and a non-binary understanding of gender.

Advisory, Social-Emotional Curriculum
My Gender Journey*
Guest speakers
School climate surveys about gender inclusiveness

Gender Spectrum works closely with schools and individual teachers to think about ways in which to bring the lens of gender into classrooms. Please email us at info@genderspectrum.org or call us at 510-788-4412.

* Materials available from Gender Spectrum

12 easy steps on the way to gender inclusiveness…

1. Avoid asking kids to line up as boys or girls or separating them by gender. Instead, use things like *odd and even birth date,* or *Which would you choose: skateboards or bikes/milk or juice/dogs or cats/summer or winter/talking or listening.* Invite students to come up with choices themselves. Consider using tools like the "appointment clock" to form pairs or groups. Always ask yourself, "Will this configuration create a gendered space?"

2. Avoid <u>always</u> using phrases such as *boys and girls, you guys, ladies and gentlemen* and other gendered expressions to get kids' attention. Use things like hey folks, listen up y'all, or hello friends, or use phrases like *calling all readers,* or *hey campers* or *could all of the athletes come here.* Create classroom names and then ask all of the "Terrific Tigers" to meet at the rug.

3. Provide an opportunity for <u>every student</u> to privately share with you the name and pronouns they use. At the beginning of the year or new semester, at back-to-school night, or following a break, privately invite kids and parents to share how the student would like to be referred to at school.

4. Have visual images reinforcing gender inclusion: pictures of people not fitting gender norms, signs that "strike out" sayings like *All Boys…* or *All Girls…* or *All Genders Welcome* door hangers.

5. When you find it necessary to reference gender, say *Boy, girl, or something else.* Use terms like *gender expansive, cisgender or non-binary.* Talk about the gender diversity of all people. When asked why, use this as a teachable moment about the incredible variations of gender that exist.

6. Provide counter-narratives that challenge students to think more broadly about their notions of gender. Point out and inquire when you hear others referencing gender in a binary manner. Ask things like, *Hmmm. That is interesting. Can you say more about that?* or *What makes you say that? I think of it a little differently.*

7. Find examples in the media and elsewhere that reinforce gender stereotypes or binary models of gender (it won't be hard; they're everywhere!). When with others, call them out and explore them.

8. Be intolerant of and interrupt openly hostile attitudes or references towards other people's gender EVERY TIME you hear or observe them, but also use these as teachable moments. Take the opportunity to engage the individual about their statements about gender. Being punitive may put a halt to the behavior, at least in your presence. Being instructive may stop it entirely.

9. Teach children specific language that empowers them to be proud of who they are, or to defend others who are being mistreated. *Please respect my privacy. You may think that, but I don't. You may not like it, but I do. Hey, they're called "private parts" for a reason.*

10. Help students recognize and see the limitations of "all or nothing" language by helping them understand the difference between patterns and rules. Teach them phrases like *That may be true for some people, but not all people,* or *frequently, but not always,* or *more common and less common.* Avoid using "normal" to define any behaviors.

11. Share personal anecdotes from your own life that reflect gender inclusiveness. Even better, share examples when you were not gender inclusive in your thinking, words or behaviors, what you learned as a result and what you will do differently next time.

12. Do the work yourself. What are your own experiences with gender? What might be some of your own biases? What assumptions do you make about the gender of others? Share these reflections about your evolving understandings of gender.

gender spectrum

Principles for Responding to Concerns

In our work with schools across the country coming from communities with an array of political beliefs and values, we have observed some very specific behaviors that educators can employ to increase the likelihood that discussions about gender work in schools does not have to become contentious.

When discussions take place about gender issues in school, they can be highly charged; the subject seems to raise a level of intensity for many that is unlike most other topics. This intensity can in turn create a negative feedback loop when the energy levels of both parties are highly charged. Since you cannot control what is happening for the other person, there are some steps you can take to minimize the potential for conflict. The following strategies can serve to de-escalate highly charged situations.

Slow things down
- Breathe
- Soften your voice
- Pause reflectively before responding to comments
- If behind a desk, move out in front of it
- Listen reflectively and rephrase what you've heard.
    - *I think I heard you say that you are worried this work will confuse the children. Is that correct?*

Appreciate the sharing of the question/concern
- Take a moment to set a positive, constructive tone by recognizing that this is being brought to your attention (even if it is the tenth conversation on the topic!)
    - *Thank you so much for caring enough about our school to discuss this with me*
    - *It sounds like you've really thought a lot about this*
    - *I can see this feels very important to you*

Try to learn what's underneath the question or concern
- In addition to rephrasing, ask probing questions to narrow down the issue that is most challenging for the person.
    - *Can you say more about that?*
    - *Can you help me understand the impact this is having on you or your child?*
    - *What might we do to support your child, you and your family?*

Bring your own experience/expertise to the table
- Fall back on the fact that you have a wealth of knowledge about schooling
- Take confidence in the fact that you have navigated challenging situations previously
    - *Here is what I have observed over the years*
    - *In similar situations in the past,*
    - *I can remember a time when a parent had a similar concern*

Return to shared beliefs
- Identify common hopes for how school will be for all students
    - *Safety is something I think we can agree is important for every child here*
    - *Kindness and respect are two values that we help every student learn and demonstrate*
    - *Creating a more positive learning environment helps every child be more successful*

School mission and values
- Invoke the commitments that have been made in writing about your school's larger purposes and approaches
    - *At our school, we believe that...*
    - *We think that one of the reasons parents want their children here is our commitment to...*
    - *As you probably know, the mission of our school is…*

Confidentiality
- Remind them that you have a professional responsibility to protect the privacy of everyone at the school
    - *Just as I would never talk about your child or family with someone else, I would never talk about another child or family with you*
    - *Invite a solution for their child (versus assuming the other child must change or adapt)*

Provide resources
- Have information, such as short articles and websites ready to share
    - *Can I share some information that other parents have found helpful who had similar questions?*
    - *I can see that you have many ideas about this subject. I will send you some links about this that I've found helpful to more fully understand these issues*

Ask for time
- There are moments when you may simply not have the time to provide a response that you feel good about
- A question or point has been raised that you are not sure about how best to respond
    - *You've really given me a lot to consider here. I'd like to think more about our conversation, and check in with my colleagues. Perhaps we could set up a time to check back next week?*
    - *I want to be able to give you and this subject the attention it deserves. Let's make an appointment to talk when we both can give this topic a bit more time and attention*

Some other thoughts…
- Views about gender are evolving rapidly, especially among young people
- In most cases, our kids are way ahead of the adults when it comes to this topic
- Work related to gender diversity benefits every student by creating safer environments in which to teach and learn
- Schools throughout the country are being very intentional about gender inclusion and successfully supporting transgender and nonbinary students. While this may be new in your community, there are many, many places where this work has been happening for years.
- Being uncomfortable is not the same as being unsafe.
- Transgender and other gender-expansive students are at far greater risk than their cisgender peers. If the worry is about "keeping all kids safe," than they are the first group we should be concerned about.

Responding to Concerns: Teaching about Gender

Why should my child learn about gender at school?
- Views and language about gender are changing rapidly. In addition, our children are encountering diverse presentations and experiences of gender almost everywhere they turn – among their classmates and friends, across social media, in popular culture, as they interact with the everyday world and increasingly in their own families. To not give them a way to make sense of that experience is to leave them unprepared to interact with the rest of the world. Just as we help young people make sense of other examples of difference they encounter, so too must we give them the tools to make sense of this aspect of life as well.
- School is a place where children are taught to respect one another and to learn to work together regardless of their differences. Learning about gender diversity is part of that work. Our students are growing up in a world that is increasingly recognizing the diversity of gender. Creating a more tolerant, inclusive, and accepting school environment teaches all children to recognize and resist stereotypes. We teach children to stand up for others, to resist bullying, and to work together.
- We also know that many children whose gender is seen as different than what is expected of them can face very difficult circumstances. Too often teasing, bullying, and violence are common experiences for a gender-expansive child. A growing number of school districts and states specifically prohibit bullying and harassment of students based on gender expression or identity. Furthermore, various federal, state and municipal laws protect students from discrimination because of their gender. Proactive education and training to help students understand gender diversity more fully helps school districts meet those legal obligations while working to create a safer, more supportive learning environment for all students.

Isn't my child too young to be learning about gender?
- Children are already learning about it. Messages about gender are everywhere, and children receive very clear messages about the "rules" for boys and girls, as well as the consequences for violating them. By learning about the diversity of gender, children have an opportunity to explore a greater range of interests, ideas, and activities. For all children, the pressure of "doing gender correctly," is greatly reduced, creating more space for them to discover new talents and interests.
- Whether in or out of school, children will encounter other children exhibiting wide ranges of gender expression. This is normal and, with a little reflection, we can all recognize it as something we encountered during our own childhoods as well. Tomboys or shy, sensitive boys are commonly recognized examples of children who buck societal expectations of gender expression. These children, and all children, deserve a safe, supportive learning environment in which they can thrive and empower themselves.

If you are talking about gender, aren't you discussing reproduction and sexuality?
- The simple answer is "no." When we discuss gender, we talk about what people like to wear, the activities they engage in, and how they feel about themselves. This is not sexuality. Sexuality involves physical intimacy and attraction. Gender is about self-identity. Gender identity is a person's internal sense of where they fit on the gender spectrum. This includes all kids, "typically" gendered or not.

- If responding to questions that arise about physical sex, the discussion uses phrases such as "private parts," and even if anatomical terms come up, nothing specific to human reproduction or sexuality is taught. For the most part, children are simply not raising these questions. While as adults, we struggle to separate the ideas of gender and sexuality (primarily because many of us were taught that they are one and the same), children have an ability to grasp the complexity of gender diversity because sexuality does not factor in to complicate their understanding.

Ideas about gender diversity go against the values we are instilling in my child at home. Are you trying to teach my child to reject these values?
- Absolutely not. Our children encounter people with different beliefs when they join any community. While one aim for learning about diversity is to become more accepting of those around us, not everyone is going to be best friends. That does not mean that they can't get along and learn together. The purpose of learning about gender diversity is to demonstrate that children are unique and that there is no single way to be a boy or a girl or any other gender. If a child does not agree with or understand another student's gender identity or expression, they do not have to change how they feel inside about it. However, they also do not get to make fun of, harass, or harm other students whose gender identity or expression they don't understand or support. Gender inclusive education is about teaching students to live and work with others. You do not need to fully understand another person's experience to treat them appropriately. It comes down to the simple agreement that all children must be treated with kindness and respect.

Won't my child get confused if we speak about more than two genders?
- Experience shows that, with developmentally appropriate information, children of any age are able to understand that there are more than the two gender categories frequently recognized by our society. When it is explained to them in a simple, age appropriate manner, gender diversity is an easy concept for children to grasp.
- When we help children see that various aspects of gender – whether one's identity, expression or body – is different for different people, it does not confuse them. Instead, it gives them confidence that as they come to understand their own gender, there does not exist one right answer or journey to which they must adhere. Far from creating confusion, this reality allows them to take pride and honor their own as well as others' gender experiences.
- When you discuss gender with your child, you may hear them exploring where they fit on the gender spectrum and why. This shows that they understand that everyone may have some variation of gender expression or identity outside of stereotypical norms. Their use of language or their reflections about their own gender may surprise you. In fact, you may find that they have language and experiences with the topic that are quite informed. We encourage all parents to approach these discussions with an air of openness and inquiry.

Don't gender-expansive kids have lots of problems? Is being transgender or gender-expansive a product of abuse, emotional problems, neglect, divorce, or detached or over-involved parents?
- No. While it is true that some transgender and nonbinary people do experience a tremendous amount of societal abuse and parental/community rejection, this is not the **cause** of their gender identity or expression. Rather, when not supported, children whose gender expression or identity is considered atypical often suffer from loneliness, lower self-esteem, and other negative feelings. Statistics reveal the devastating impact these youth face when placed into non-supportive or hostile settings.

- A gender-expansive child's emotional distress is a **response** to the mistreatment they have likely faced from those around them. It is not at all uncommon to see a gender-expansive or transgender child's distress greatly reduce or disappear when they're provided with a more positive environment that acknowledges their experiences as authentic.

Won't allowing children to express non-traditional genders cause them to be teased or harassed?
- While there is a great deal of data suggesting that gender-expansive youth do face teasing, there is a growing body of knowledge that points to the impact gender-expansive education can have on reducing that mistreatment. If children are being treated badly because of who they are, the answer is not to try and prevent them from being themselves. Instead, we should ask what needs to be done to address the teasing. Providing educational programming and training that expands students' understanding about stereotypes and limitations of self-expression can go a long way to preventing teasing.
- If children are being mistreated because of their gender, there is a likelihood that children displaying other forms of difference are probably also being mistreated. The degree to which a school environment is accepting of gender diversity may well indicate just how welcoming the school is for all students no matter who they are.

Won't discussing gender encourage my child to be transgender?
- Being transgender is not something that a person chooses. Studies show that although parents cannot make their child transgender (or gay for that matter), they can deeply influence how their children feel about themselves. No one can "make" another person become a particular gender; gender is highly personal. This one reason why practices such as conversion or reparative therapy have been discredited by every major professional mental health association, as well as deemed illegal in a growing number of states.
- Quite to the contrary, parental pressure to enforce gender conformity can damage a child's self-esteem and is a high predictor of negative health outcomes and risk-taking behaviors for youth. Transgender youth currently have an extremely high attempted suicide rate: some estimate it being as high as 50 percent. Discussing gender will have the effect of removing much of the pressure students face to fit into narrowly defined expectations that few if any can actually meet.

If transgender people are so "normal", why are some families so private about it?
- A family with a transgender child will decide together how much they wish to share with others. Many transgender children prefer to live their lives as the gender that reflects their internal gender identity without using the word "transgender." For example, the child would identify themselves as a girl or boy as opposed to a transgender girl or boy. In many cases, they simply want to be seen as another boy or girl, not a transgender boy or girl. Their gender is only part of what makes them who they are.
- Some children and families are open and share this with everyone in their lives. Others choose to maintain a sense of complete privacy, while still others find a blend of these two approaches. In most families, this decision will be determined jointly by the child and guardian(s), often in collaboration with a medical, mental health, or other professionals experienced in this area.
- If a family honors their child's wish for privacy, this can be misinterpreted as secrecy, or even shame. In reality, it may be an effort to avoid potential stigmatization or to simply keep a very personal topic private. Maintaining privacy is everyone's right and a very personal decision that each family typically makes after careful consideration and conversation.

How can I correct or modify the impression I have already given my child about gender?

● It is powerful to let children know that we don't know the answer to everything, and to reinforce that adults as well as children are always learning. Having conversations with your children that reflect your growing understanding is wonderful. It does not undermine your parenting. If you were to discover that you had unknowingly taught your child another form of misinformation about other people, you would correct the impression you had mistakenly given them. With gender, it is no different. Gender diversity is something that both society and science are constantly exploring and understanding more deeply.

I don't really feel like I know how to answer my child's questions.

● Once again, explain that you are learning about this too. It is important, however, to monitor and understand your own feelings before you initiate this kind of conversation. Children can pick up on your feelings towards a subject. So, if you are still feeling uncomfortable about the concept of gender diversity, then consider taking additional time to increase your understanding. Read, talk to others, and further educate yourself. When you have greater understanding and increased awareness, then you will likely feel more confident to talk with your children.

● Answer children's questions simply, and let them take the lead in how deep the conversation goes. Most children are satisfied with this approach. They will guide the conversation from there and rarely ask the complex questions that occur to adults. You may be surprised at how simply children navigate this terrain. Some parents have found responses such as, "Hmmm, I am just learning about that myself. Let me tell you what I know, and then if you would like to learn more, maybe we could do that together," to be helpful in opening up pathways for further discussion.

Responding to Concerns: Supporting Transgender Students

Why is the school making such a big deal about this? How many of these kids are there anyway?
- Of course I can't talk about any individual students, just as I would never talk about your child. Personal information about our students, including their gender identity is private. But is there something we can do to help you or your child better understand gender-related issues?
- Many people don't realize that gender-based discrimination is illegal under Title IX, and that gender is a protected class in many states and cities (just like race, religion or disability). Unfortunately, these protections are necessary because transgender and other gender-expansive students frequently face a great deal of discrimination from other students, staff and community members. We are committed to protecting any student who is being singled out for mistreatment.
- Organizations such as the PTA, the National Education Association, the American School Counselor Association and a great many other associations for administrators, school psychologists, and other educational professionals have written clear position statements and guidelines about the need to make sure that transgender and other gender-expansive students are safe at school.
- 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?

Who is protecting my child?
- I can assure you that the safety of all of the students at this school remains my highest priority. If your child is feeling unsafe, we need to know about it. Can you tell me about specific situations or occurrences that have taken place in which your child's safety was at risk? Are there specific comments or behaviors of another person that are making your child feel unsafe?
- We expect all of our students to respect the privacy and physical boundaries of other students. If the specific behaviors of one student are making another student feel unsafe, that is an issue we take very seriously. Is someone behaving in a way that makes your child feel unsafe?
- Is it possible that you or your child are feeling uncomfortable rather than unsafe? I know for many people this topic is new and unfamiliar, which can lead to discomfort. We want your child to feel comfortable at school; if for any reason your student needs additional support, such as a private space to change or use the restroom, we will work with you and your child to provide these.

Who decides if a student is transgender? What is to prevent a boy from coming to school one day and simply declaring that he is a girl and changing in the girl's locker room?
- We have very specific processes for any students who require support related to their gender. Schools have always worked to support the needs of individual students in a variety of ways; gender is just one of them. This does not take place without a great deal of care and planning.
- Schools all over the country have been supporting transgender students in these ways for many years. This issue simply does not come up. Our established processes would easily catch any student pretending to be a different gender for whatever purpose they may have.
- A transgender student is very different from a young person who is claiming to be a different gender for some improper purpose. Transgender students are not trying to get away with something or making this up; why would they? Conversely, any student pretending to be transgender would be easily identified in the planning processes we have established.
- Our policy of treating transgender students consistent with their gender identity does not permit a student of the opposite sex to enter into the wrong facilities. These are two separate issues.

![gender spectrum logo]

Talking to Students About Gender

You may think young students are too little to talk about gender, but they get messages about gender from everywhere! Children are taught gender ideas and expectations of their family, school, culture and faith community all the time; it is so pervasive that most of us don't even notice it.

That's why it is important to determine what we want students to understand about gender and to be prepared to talk about with them when necessary. You may be nervous about talking with students about gender, but gender doesn't need to be a difficult, serious topic. We want to teach kids that their experience of gender can be joyful--open to experimentation and play. We want to create space for them to explore and see what feels right for them.

This is a great opportunity for you to learn about your students' gender and let them know they are supported no matter what! Here are a few key concepts about gender to consider:

- Everyone's gender is unique to them. How you see yourself and how you want to express your gender is personal - there is not just one way to be.
- Things, like toys and clothes, don't have genders -- people have genders.
- You can't tell a person's gender just by looking at them.
- Your body doesn't determine your gender.

Some general tips:
- Be proactive about talking about gender; you don't need to wait for students to bring it up or for an incident to arise.
- Ask questions--this is a great way to hear the ideas kids already have about gender.
- Talk about yourself, or things you encounter related to gender, so that children can express their thoughts without having to talk about themselves.
- When you see materials depicting gender, ask questions that encourage critical thinking: "who seems to be strong in the story?" "Who seems to be in charge?" "Who is kind?"
- Read and talk about books addressing gender or the limitations of binary views of the world.
- Be conscious about how you praise students. Girls are often praised for their clothes or hairstyle, or for being sweet or kind, while boys are often praised for being big, or tough or independent. If you hear this type of praise from other adults, think about joining in with other types of praise.
- Question and explore your own biases. For example, how do you feel about boys who wear nail polish, and girls who want to shop in the boy's department for clothes? What messages about gender expression were you given as a child?
- Mix up gender language when reading stories to your students.

- For most kids, experimenting with gender will be just that--exploration and play. For some kids, though, it may feel more intense. If one of your students is insistent about their gender in ways that are outside of societal norms, they may be telling you something. Visit genderspectrum.org for more information.

Below are some situations that often come up with young kids around gender, with some ideas about how you might use the opportunity to build your students' gender literacy. Of course, these are just a few options. Finding what feels right for you is important -- you'll find your way with some practice.

Is that person a boy or a girl?

- Well, we don't know just by looking at someone what their gender is. If we want to know, we would need to ask them. Is there a reason you're interested, or just curious?
- I don't know - some people feel like they are either a boy, or a girl, and there are also kids who feel like they're both a boy and a girl, or they don't really feel like either one. Have you ever met anyone who feels that way? If someone asked you what your gender is, what would you say?

Is red a boy color or a girl color?

- Do you think there are colors just for boys, and colors just for girls? Maybe colors are just colors- and everyone gets to like whatever colors they find beautiful!
- I think the world is filled with so many beautiful colors and that we all get to enjoy them. How sad it would be to think that someone couldn't like a color because of their gender!

Boys can't wear dresses!

- There are lots of different types of clothes. Kids should get to wear what feels right to them and makes them feel good.
- Sometimes I get confused about this too. Did you know that people used to say girls couldn't wear pants? That sounds silly now, but that's what people used to think. I think clothes are just clothes and each of us gets to decide what we like and don't like.

Girls can't play football!

- Do you think it is fair if someone is told they have to do something, or can't do something, because of their gender? I think kids can have any interest they want to have.
- When I was growing up, sometimes people made fun of me because I was a boy who liked to bake; do you have any interests like that- something that others say you can't do, or be interested in, because of your gender?

Ella isn't a real girl.

- Tell me what you think makes someone a real girl, or a real boy. Do you think we get to decide gender for others, or do each of us get to decide our gender for ourselves?
- Ella knows her gender better than we do. If she says she's a girl, then I think she's a girl.

Scope and Sequence:
Gender Inclusive Instruction

Rather than a static set of lessons in a particular sequence, the following provides a spiral framework that can be applied to all grades. Taught using developmentally appropriate approaches and materials, the sequence engages students in a circular path of learning that exemplifies gender's complex and iterative nature.

Unit 1: Gender, Society, and Me:
What images do we receive about gender and where do they come from?

Students will reflect upon their gender experiences and identify some of the messages they receive about gender from those around them. Ultimately, students will be encouraged to consider the complexity of gender and the many ways it is perceived, interacted with and shaped by individuals themselves and by those around them.

Unit 2: Gender 101
What is gender?

In these lessons, students will become familiar with what gender is and all of the diverse ways that people can experience gender. It includes a developmentally appropriate focus on the three dimensions of gender (body, identity and social) and gender congruence. This unit will also include an introduction to the distinction between binary and spectrum models and the ways that individuals identify that include binary and non-binary identities. This unit also includes an examination of the language of gender and how it evolves to capture this unique aspect of self.

Unit 3: Gender Across Time and Space
How is gender understood and experienced in different ways across time and culture?

Students will be introduced to the idea that the way one society thinks about and defines gender is not the only ways that it can be understood. In this unit, students will learn about and engage with different societies, across geography, culture and time, and be asked to reflect on how different people and societies make sense of gender. They will also examine various ways in which gender expression, roles and terminology have shifted in the United States (and beyond) over time.

Unit 4: What now?
Why is it important to understand gender?

Students will be asked to use all that they've learned about gender to reflect upon how they can understand and relate to themselves and others. This unit will encourage them to consider some of the ways in which they have been affected by the gender expectations, how they can recognize their own gender story and how they can advocate for greater understanding and support of people who face discrimination based on their gender. They will ultimately address the question, "What does gender inclusion mean to me and why is it important?"

REV 082219