Working with Resistance: Supporting Transgender and Nonbinary Students in North Carolina and Beyond

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Today’s Plan

- Welcome
- Overview of NC Approach
- Group Discussion
- Best Practices Overview
- Your turn! (Scenarios)
- Closing and Add’l Resources
Thanks Y’all!
The Elephant in the Room...
“If everyone helps to hold up the sky, then one person does not become tired.”
— Askhari Johnson Hodari
Overview of CDC HIV Funding

• June 2013, CDC DASH funding for a 5-year cycle
• 18 states funded
• 4 Approaches and Surveillance
Approaches

• Exemplary Sexual Health Education
• Access to Sexual Health Services
• **Safe and Supportive Environments**
• Education Decision-Makers/Policy (e.g., maintaining SHACs)
Cooperative Agreement

CDC

Advocates for Youth

North Carolina

American Psychological Association

NCSD
NC State Board Goals:
Every Student is Healthy, Safe, and Responsible
State Board Goals

1. Create and maintain a safe and respectful school environment
2. Promote healthy, active lifestyles for students
3. Decrease the number of students who are chronically absent, dropout, or suspended out of school
4. Decrease violence and crime in schools
School Violence Prevention Act

I was teased by my classmates because of harassment. I was beaten up in school because I was gay. I actually contemplated suicide at times as a teenager because of harassment.

I was different.

The pain is still with me today.

I was harassed by my classmates because

MANY VOICES, ONE MESSAGE:
BULLYING HURTS.

School Violence Prevention
SB 526 (passed 2009)

Bullying or harassing behavior includes, but is not limited to, acts reasonably perceived as being motivated by any actual or perceived differentiating characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, gender, socioeconomic status, academic status, gender identity, physical appearance, sexual orientation, or mental, physical, developmental, or sensory disability, or by association with a person who has or is perceived to have one or more of these characteristics.
Federal Protections

• Title IX is the federal education law that protects students from discrimination based on sex. It remains unsettled in courts whether sex discrimination pertains to gender identity

• Currently the interpretation of Title IX is relegated to states for a process at the local level.
Healthy Children Learn Better
Victimization & Sexual Orientation

- **5%** Threatened or injured with a weapon
- **9%** Bullied on School Property
- **37%** Electronically Bullied

- **12%** Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual
- **10%** Heterosexual

2015 N.C. YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY (YRBS)
Suicide & Sexual Orientation

- **Made a suicide attempt that resulted in an injury needing treatment by a medical professional**
  - Heterosexual: 9%
  - Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual: 13%

- **Made a plan for suicide**
  - Heterosexual: 11%
  - Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual: 38%

- **Seriously considered attempting suicide**
  - Heterosexual: 12%
  - Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual: 47%

2015 N.C. YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY (YRBS)
Trans Youth Data
Supporting Transgender Students
Learning the Hard Way
Administrative Support

• Set the tone of school
• Provide / create opportunities for Professional Development
• Want to support all of their students
Objectives of NC Training

• Discuss key definitions and terminology
• Review statistics related to LGBTQ bullying and discrimination
• Discuss best practices for addressing the needs of transgender youth
Training Design & Structure

• 1.5 hours & 3 hours
• Transgender Training Institute
• Two co-facilitators
• DPI staff always present for training
Partnerships

• SHIFT NC
  • Supportive Schools Coordinator
• Title V – Abstinence Education
  • ~40 trainings on Ally
  • Supports Collaborative Position
• Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools
  • Video and Curriculum Support
• And more!

https://vimeo.com/144035363
Facilitating Factors

• DPI Leadership
• NC State Board of Education
• Collaborative Partnerships
• District Relationships
• Section Chief History
PD Opportunities

• Welcoming Schools
• How to Be an Ally
• Supporting Transgender Students
Ally Update
Collaborative Position
Dress Code

Have the right to dress in a manner consistent with their gender identity or expression as long as the student’s attire complies with the school- or district-wide dress code.
Gender-Separated Activities
Names and Pronouns

MY PRONOUNS ARE:

__  __

___
Official Records
Other School Supports

• Genders and Sexualities Alliances (GSAs) in middle and high schools
• Portray gender diversity in library books, etc.
• Inclusive language
• Safe Zone/Ally stickers
• Community Resources
Greater than HB2 (HB142) – So Many Supportive Opportunities

• Words We Use
• Laws and Policies
• PD/Training
• Practices/Climate
I wish my teachers knew... transgender students aren't dangerous.
I wish my teacher... didn't say "Okay, boys & girls..."
I wish my teachers knew...

Pronouns Matter

We should have Gay Sex Ed!
I wish my teachers knew...

That when they support LGBTQIA students, they can help save a life.

I wish my students knew...

We love them no matter their identity or expression.
“Youth, Interrupted”

Vinnie Holt
Transgender Student, CMS NC
Discussion

WHEN?

HOW?

WHAT?

WHERE?

WHY?

WHO?
Approaches that have worked for you

• Think about a time when you successfully addressed a controversial situation with a colleague, parent, or supervisor at work.
• What did you do/say that helped lead to a successful outcome?
Some Broad Strategies

• Be Proactive
• Meet people where they are
• Make this about all students
• Connect to equity across the board
• Show how discrimination has consequences
Proactive: Creating Gender Inclusive Schools

Stereotype:
Judging someone because they are in a group.

* A stereotype can be about something.
* Sometimes when we see someone, we look at them and
  know about them because:
  - the way they look
  - their gender
  - the group they're in
  - knowledge they have.
What’s Up with Bathrooms?

- “A transgender child might show his or her body?”
- “What about my child’s privacy?”
- “Who is protecting my child?”
- “Who knows what they’ll get up to in there?”
- “What if I’m simply just not comfortable with my child being in the same restroom/locker room?”
Who is at risk?

- 59%-64% of transgender and gender-expansive students avoid bathrooms and locker rooms due to feeling unsafe or uncomfortable.

- 59%-60% of transgender and gender-expansive students report verbal harassment.

- 22%-29% of transgender and gender-expansive students report physical harassment.

- 9%-16% of transgender and gender-expansive students report physical assault.

(Greytak, et al, 2013)
Real Underpinnings of Bathroom Safety

- **Climate**: Do students feel safe in general?
- **Supervision**: How adults proactively pay attention to the school’s climate
- **Behavior**: Setting clear expectations for how students treat each other
Here’s How It’s Done
Why Not Just Let Them Use a Private Bathroom?

- Denies transgender student’s identity
- Stigmatizes students Leads to health issues
- Affects learning
- Can draw negative attention
Multiple Reasons for Private Options

• Modesty
• Cultural or religious reasons
• Disability
• Chronic health issues (including intersex students)
• Gender
Better Approach

- Non-stigmatized options for all students.
- No mandates for any group of students. (Mandate = Stigma)
But My Child is Not Safe. . .

Not feeling comfortable ≠ Not being safe

One person’s discomfort does not eclipse another person’s rights.

One person’s discomfort is never a reason to infringe on someone else’s rights –

State Senator Creem, Michigan
What About Genitals?

• Regardless of gender identity, it is inappropriate for any student to actively attempt to view another student’s genitals.

• Students should be well aware of behavioral expectations that forbid such actions

• A behavior issue, not a gender issue

• Transgender students more at risk for mistreatment than for improper conduct
Staying Focused on Real Issues
Conversation Strategies

- Acknowledge discomfort
  - I know this is new and confusing for many . . .

- Invite dialogue
  - Tell me what you’ve heard.

- Focus on organizational mission
  - Our goal is to support all students

- Create an emotional connection/empathy
  - Let me tell you a story about one family I know. . .

- Address misconceptions
  - I can assure you that the safety of all students remains my highest priority. There has been no inappropriate behavior.

- Set clear expectations
  - I won’t talk about any individual students, just as I would never talk about your child.
Who Wants to Practice?!
Scenario 1: A Parent

Your school has been implementing training and procedures related to transgender students and some parents are angry about these initiatives. One parent says to you, “What about protecting my daughter so she doesn’t have to be in the bathroom with boys or potential predators?”
Scenario 2: A Colleague

You are talking to a group of colleagues and one says, “There is no way that I’m going to use *they* as a pronoun. I teach English and it’s not grammatically correct. Besides these kids are just confused. We don’t do them any favors by coddling them.”
Scenario 3: A District Administrator

A district administrator says to you, “I think we can support transgender students without making a big deal of it. We just need to do what we already do: make sure that every school prioritizes social and emotional learning and treating all students with respect.”
Proactive vs. Reactive

“Instead of ‘putting out fires’ by treating the needs of each transgender student as an issue to resolve, schools should engage in ‘fire prevention’ by fostering a school environment that celebrates gender diversity.” (Schools in Transition)
Contact Information

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Additional Resources

• Gender Spectrum
  • Schools in Transition
  • Back to School Toolkit

• American Psychological Association

• DC – Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Policy Guidance