

The Rivers School Policy on Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Individuals

INTRODUCTION

The Rivers School (the “School”) believes that excellence in education and social development requires a diverse, inclusive and socially responsible community. We seek students, trustees, faculty and staff from diverse backgrounds and provide opportunities for the expression and support of a broad range of experiences and viewpoints. As a community, we encourage students and adults to value themselves, celebrate differences, promote mutual respect, and participate with confidence and courage in a diverse society. To that end, the School has adopted this policy to foster an educational environment that is safe and free from discrimination for all constituencies, regardless of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

This policy aims to reduce the stigmatization and facilitate the integration of transgender and gender nonconforming individuals, while maintaining the privacy of all individuals and their families and fostering cultural competence for the larger Rivers community. Furthermore, this policy will support healthy communication between educators, parents/guardians and students to further the successful educational development and well-being of every member of the community.

This policy covers, but is not limited to, conduct that takes place on school property and at all school-sponsored functions and activities. This policy also pertains to usage of electronic communication that occurs between members of the School community. This policy applies to all members of the school community, including, but not limited to, students, employees, parents, volunteers, and guests.

In compliance with state and federal law, the School shall accept the gender identity that each individual asserts. There is no medical or mental health diagnosis or treatment threshold that individuals must meet in order to have their gender identity recognized and respected by all members of the community.

The School recognizes that the needs of individuals across the range from identity questioning to assertion will be unique to their particular circumstances. Therefore, to support individuals who seek support and guidance from the School, we will balance all relevant factors including, but not limited to, the individual’s preference, protecting privacy, maximizing social integration, minimizing stigmatization, the individual’s safety, and the available facilities on campus. Any individual who needs assistance with this policy, including addressing concerns about student records, school facilities and other activities, should contact the Dean of Students, the appropriate grade dean, the student’s advisor, or another trusted adult in the community.

DEFINITIONS¹

These definitions are provided not for the purpose of labeling students but rather to assist in understanding the terminology within this policy. Individuals may or may not use these terms to describe themselves.

Gender - Attitudes, feelings, characteristics, and behaviors that a given culture associates with being male or female and that are often labeled as “masculine” or “feminine.”

Gender Identity - A person’s deeply held sense or psychological knowledge of their own gender. One’s gender identity can be the same or different than the gender assigned at birth.

Gender Expression - The manner in which a person represents or expresses socially-defined gender to others, often through behavior, social interactions, clothing, hairstyles, activities, speech patterns or mannerisms.

Gender Nonconforming - A term for a person whose gender expression differs from stereotypical expectations, such as “feminine” boys, “masculine” girls, and those who are perceived as androgynous. This includes people who identify outside traditional gender categories or identify as both genders.

Sex - In a dichotomous scheme, the designation of a person at birth as either “male” or “female” based on their anatomy and/or biology.

Sexual Orientation - A person’s physical, romantic, emotional and/or spiritual attraction to another person. Common terms used to describe sexual orientation include, but are not limited to, heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian, gay, asexual, and bisexual. Sexual orientation is **distinct** from sex, gender identity, and gender expression.

Transgender - An adjective describing a person whose gender identity or expression is different from that traditionally associated with an assigned sex at birth. For some transgender individuals, this process involves primarily a social transition, rather than any medical treatment, such as changing an individual’s first name, pronouns, clothing, and appearance - traits that are reflective of an individual’s gender expression.

¹ Transgender and gender nonconforming youth use a number of words to describe their lives and gendered experiences. To list just a few examples, these students may refer to themselves as trans, transsexual, transgender, male-to-female (MTF), female-to-male (FTM), bi-gender, two-spirit, trans man, trans woman, and a variety of other terms. Terminology and language describing transgender individuals can differ based on region, language, race or ethnicity, age, culture, and many other factors. Generally speaking, school staff and educators should inquire which terms students may prefer and avoid terms that make these students uncomfortable; a good general guideline is to employ those terms which the students use to describe themselves. *Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network*

Transition - The process that a person goes through as the person changes their gender expression and/or physical appearance to align with their gender identity.

NAMES/PRONOUNS

Every individual has the right to be addressed by a name and pronoun that they decide corresponds to their gender identity. A court-ordered name or gender change is not required, and the student need not change their official records. While inadvertent slips or honest mistakes in the use of preferred names or pronouns may occur, the School will not tolerate intentional and persistent refusal to respect an individual's gender identity by using the wrong name and/or pronoun.

OFFICIAL RECORDS

The School will maintain appropriate student records that include a student's legal name and gender assigned at birth. To the extent that the School is not legally required to use a student's legal name and gender on other school records or documents, the School shall use the name and gender preferred by the student. This may include, but is not limited to, letters of recommendation, diploma, student schedules, disciplinary records, etc. The School will change a student's official record to reflect a change in legal name or gender upon receipt of documentation that such change has been made pursuant to a court order, or through amendment of state or federally-issued identification.

The School is sensitive to the private nature of discussions and documentation regarding a student's name and/or gender and is committed to protecting the student's confidentiality by restricting the use of, and access to, this information in accordance with applicable law. The School is also sensitive to the role parents/guardians play in this matter and will work closely with families to ensure that they receive the support they may need.

ACCESS TO GENDER-SEGREGATED AREAS

The Rivers School maintains separate restroom facilities for males and females, with the exception of the gender-neutral bathrooms on the first floor of the Campus Center. The School may maintain separate restroom, locker room or changing facilities, to which individuals are allowed access based on their gender identity.

In any gender-segregated facility, any individual who is uncomfortable using a shared facility, regardless of the reason, shall, upon the individual's request, be provided with a reasonable

alternative. This may include, for example, addition of a privacy partition or curtain, provision to use a nearby private restroom or office, or a separate changing schedule. Requiring a transgender or gender nonconforming student to use a separate, nonintegrated space threatens to publicly identify and marginalize the student as transgender, and should not be done unless requested by a student. Under no circumstances may students be required to use sex-segregated facilities that are inconsistent with their gender identity.

The Dean of Students, the appropriate grade dean, and the student's advisor will meet with students making specific requests to review appropriate adjustments as they apply to restrooms and changing facilities on campus.

ACCESS TO GENDER-SEGREGATED ATHLETIC TEAMS

Transgender students are permitted to participate on sex-segregated teams in a manner consistent with their gender identity, to the extent that their participation complies with the athletic competition rules and bylaws of the New England Prep School Athletic Council and the Independent School League.

DRESS CODE

Individuals are permitted to dress in accordance with their gender identity and gender expression, within the constraints of the dress code adopted by the School. School staff shall not enforce a school's dress code more strictly against transgender and gender nonconforming students than other students.

OTHER GENDER-BASED ACTIVITIES, RULES, POLICIES and PRACTICES

The School will evaluate all gender-based activities, rules, policies, and practices on an ongoing basis, and maintain only those that have a clear and sound pedagogical purpose. Individuals shall be permitted to participate in any such activities or conform to any such rule, policy, or practice consistent with their gender identity.

COMMUNITY TRAINING AND PROCEDURE

The School will conduct training for all faculty and staff members on their responsibilities under applicable laws and this policy. Information regarding this policy shall be incorporated into training for new school employees as part of the new faculty seminar series.

The School will implement ongoing professional development to build the skills of all staff members to prevent, identify and respond to bullying, harassment and discrimination. The content of such professional development shall include, but not be limited to:

(i) inviting experts on gender identity to campus to discuss language, concepts, and current developmental understandings of gender identity, gender expression, and gender diversity in children and adolescents;

(ii) developmentally appropriate strategies for communication with students and parents about issues related to gender identity and gender expression that protect student privacy;

(iii) developmentally appropriate strategies for preventing and intervening in incidents of harassment.

CONCLUSION

This guidance cannot anticipate every situation in which questions may come up in the implementation of this policy, and the needs of each transgender or gender nonconforming individual should be assessed and addressed on a case-by-case basis. The School will continue to provide assistance, support, and resources as we work together to create a safe and supportive environment for all individuals.