# Gender Inclusive Language

Guidance for SFUSD Educators



**SFUSD PRIDE**

Curriculum & Instruction Division
Student & Family Services Division

# Table of Contents

**Introduction Letter**

To All SFUSD staff:

The Graduate Profile, as outlined in Vision 2025, defines SFUSD's work to prepare students to enter the 21st century. The aim is to help students develop their fullest potential, and be ready to lead and work with others. Curriculum, classroom practices, individual supports and equity practices, assist students to reach this goal.

Since 1990, San Francisco Unified School District has worked to create welcoming and affirming schools for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning (LGBTQ+) students and families through LGBTQ Student Services.. The charge of LGBTQ Student Services is to assist all schools to create and sustain school climates where LGBTQ students, families and staff are free to identify and express themselves authentically and safely.

This equity work intersects with the multiple other ways we uplift our students' and families' multifaceted identities including  race, culture, class, and ability; it also deepens our collective understanding of gender. Diversities of gender, found in cultures around the world, have been systemically erased and unacknowledged in our histories but that is changing. Student needs, inclusive of gender diversity, identity, and expression are pushing SFUSD to redefine educator practices, student programs and individual support for the 21st century world that they are shaping.

This guide is another step toward fostering inclusive school communities and fulfilling our responsibility to LGBTQ+ and nonbinary students and families, It is not our intention to shift personally held beliefs, but rather to cultivate and clarify educator pedagogy and classroom practices that contribute to safe, welcoming and affirming schools. How we model inclusiveness and respect concretely demonstrates an educator's equity stance and impacts student development and achievement.

We hope that this guidance supports educators to take steps in incorporating gender inclusive practices in their equity stance that will in turn benefit and support students throughout SFUSD.

In community,


Dr. Nicole Priestly, Chief Academic Officer
Curriculum & Instruction Division
Pronouns: she, her, hers


Mele Lau-Smith, Chief
Student & Family Services Division
Pronouns: she, her, hers

**Exploring Common Gender Terms**

The following gender terms may be new to you or your school. Below is a brief guide to common gender terms. . These definitions are pulled from SFUSD Administrative Regulation 5145.4 and the LGBTQ Family + Gender Diversity elementary educator guide.  The terms and definitions below may slightly vary in other LGBTQ-focused guidance and curricula.

We understand that laguage relating to sex, gender and sexual orientation is fluid, complex and can be sensitive. Students, families and educators may use terms for themselves and definitions that are different from those found here. ***Always mirror the language used by LGBTQ+ individuals to refer to themselves and get their consent to use/share specific and personal terms with others.***

If a student is using terms unfamiliar to you, use context clues to figure out what that term means, rather than interrupting a student in the middle of a disclosure. If by the end you're still unsure, simply ask a student "What does that term mean to you?" to demonstrate that each student may relate to terms differently.

- **Assigned Sex at Birth:** This refers to the terms used to categorize primary sex carectoristices (e.g. penis, vulva) based upon their external apperance at birth. Ex: Assigned Female at Birth (AFAB) or assigned male at birth (AMAB).
- **Gender**: Gender is defined as an individual's stated gender identity, this can include binary genders such as man/boy, woman/girl, or nonbinary identities such as agender, nonbinary, or gender queer.
- **Cisgender (cis)**: Cisgender means a person whose gender identity is the same as what is typically associated with their assigned sex at birth.
- **Transgender (trans)**: Transgender means a person whose gender identity is different from that typically associated with the assigned sex at birth.  This can be binary (ex: trans man, trans woman), or non-bianary (ex: non-binary, genderfluid, agender).  Not all non-binary persons identify as trans, and not all trans people identify as non-binary.
- **Non-Binary**: An umbrella term for genders that fall outside the binary (boy/man, girl/woman). People who identify as non-binary sometimes identify as a mix of binary genders, outside of the gender binary entierly, or a fluid combination of all of the above which is ever changing.
- **Gender Identity**: Gender identity of a person refers to a person's gender-related identity, appearance, or behavior as determined from a person's internal sense of their gender, regardless of if their gender identity, appearance, or behavior is different from that traditionally associated with a person's physiology or assigned sex at birth.
- **Gender Expression**: Gender expression refers to how someone chooses to express their gender, this can be demonstrated through their manner of dress, speech, behavior, this can be aligned with or different from what might be typically expected of a a person's assigned sex at birth or their gender identity.
- **Gender-Nonconforming (GNC)**: Gender non-conforming refers to a person whose gender expression differs from stereotypical expectations.

- **Stereotype:** A generalization, usually negative, about persons based on some characteristics. The generalization is then attributed to everyone who may fit into that group.

## What is Inclusive Language?

Inclusive language is speaking to or about people (individually or in groups) in a manner that does not use gender-specific words. Avoid using gender-specific words unless you are certain about a person's family structure, identity, or relationship orientation. Instead use words that convey inclusivity of all families, identities, and relationships.

For example:

| | INSTEAD OF | CONSIDER USING |
|---|---|---|
| **Families** | Mom, Dad | Caregiver(s), Guardian(s), Adult(s), Grown-Up(s) |
| **Identities** | Boys, Girls | Everyone, everybody, ya'll, folks, learners, students, they/their, persons, ask for pronouns |
| **Relationships** | Boyfriend, Girlfriend | Partner, date, sweetheart,images that normalize a variety of relationship/family formations, significant other |

Greeting groups of people can be another place to practice inclusive language. For example:

### INSTEAD OF

### ladies   gentlemen   ma'am   sir   girls   guys   etc.

### CONSIDER USING

| "Thanks, **friends**. Have a great night." | "Good morning, **folks**!" | "Hi, **everyone**!" | "Can I get you **all** something?" |
| | | "And for **you**?" | |

(adapted from an image created by: qmunity.ca)

## Common Pronouns

Pronouns are linguistic tools that we use to refer to people in the third-person. By being conscious of how we use pronouns, we demonstrate respect for all people, whether transgender, non-binary, gender nonconforming, or cisgender. Below are some common examples of pronouns used in schools . Pronouns are always evolving. Never assume you know a person's pronoun.

| COMMON PRONOUNS | HOW TO USE PRONOUNS | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **[Name]** | **[Name]** is funny | I laughed with **[Name]** | The book is not **[Name]'s** |
| **he/him/his** | **He** joked | I laughed with **him** | That joke is not **his** |
| **she/her/hers** | **She** joked | I laughed with **her** | That joke is not **hers** |
| **they/them/theirs (singular neutral)** | **They** joked | I laughed with **them** | That joke is not **theirs** |

The chart on the previous page is not an exhaustive list of pronouns. Other pronouns, such as ze/hir/hirs, have been documented and used in communities across the globe and, although not as common, might be used by students. Remember, just as a name is a signifier of that individual's identity, someone's pronouns are a deep reflection of who they are.

*Honorifics*

Some transgender and nonbinary teachers are using the honorific "Mx" (prounounced like "Mix") as a neutral alternative to Mr. and Ms. Read this article from US Today to learn more.

Given the diversity of pronouns in our communities, and the possibility that you will be requested to use any of these to refer to students, the following section lists general inclusive best practices which can be incorporated into your practice with students, families and other staff. Using a student's proper pronouns can lesson their suicide risk by up to 50%.

***Always mirror the language used by trans and queer individuals to refer to themselves and get their consent to use/share specific and personal terms with others.***

### General Usage Guidelines[1]

- Avoid using *he* as a universal pronoun; likewise, avoid using binary alternatives such as *he/she*, *he or she,* or *(s)he.*

- As the editors of the recent editions of the *Chicago Manual of Style* (2017), the *Associated Press Stylebook* (2018), and other style guides affirm, the pronoun *they* is appropriate to use in writing when referring to singular antecedents, including when writing for publication.

- Unless the gender of a singular personal antecedent is otherwise specified, use the gender-neutral singular pronouns *they, them, their,* and *theirs.*

- The *Chicago Manual of Style* affirms that the pronoun *themself* may be used to signal a singular antecedent; that some people may alternatively prefer to use *themselves* to signal a singular antecedent; and that a person's stated preference should be respected.

- *Are* is the present-tense verb for the singular pronoun *they,* just as *are* is the present-tense verb for the singular pronoun *you.*

---

[1] Recommendations adapted from the National Council of Teachers of English's (NCTE) Statement on Gender and Language

- When referring to any individual, respect that individual's specific pronoun usage, or lack thereof. (Note: while the singular *they* is the most common nonbinary pronoun, there are others, including but not limited to *ey / em / eirs* and *ze / hir / hirs*.

  See the [University of Minnesota's "Nonbinary Gender Pronouns"](#) declension and usage chart for more)

## Some Usage Examples[2]

| **EXCLUSIONARY**<br>(Binary) | **INCLUSIVE**<br>(all genders) | **INCLUSIVE**<br>(student with they/them/theirs pronouns) |
|---|---|---|
| "Every cast member should know **his or her** lines by Friday." | "Every cast member should know **their** lines by Friday." | "Alex needs to learn **their** lines by Friday." |
| "Each student should wait until **he/she** is notified of **his/her** test results." | "Each student should wait until **they** are notified of their test results." | "Janani should wait until **they** are notified of their test results." |

## Recommendations for Working with Students

*Regarding Grammar and Usage*

- Observe all of the General Usage Guidelines in the previous page when exploring language usage in classrooms, communicating with students, preparing curriculum and materials, designing class activities, and responding to student writing.

- Frame instruction in grammar and usage conventions with ongoing discussion of the inherently dynamic and evolving nature of language, rather than asserting, implicitly or explicitly, that grammar and usage rules are timeless, universal, or absolute. Language shifts; make that part of the classroom conversation.

- When the gender of a singular antecedent is unknown, allow and encourage students to use the gender-neutral singular pronouns *they, them, their,* and *theirs*, rather than using binary alternatives such as *he/she, he or she,* or *(s)he.*

- Allow students who choose not to refer to themselves with any pronouns to self-describe as they see fit, according to context.

- Note that while a rising number of major print-language authorities such as those noted in the previous page now embrace the use of the singular pronoun *they*, makers of most standardized tests have not yet adopted this policy. Track the treatment of the singular *they* in the standardized tests your students may be taking

---

[2] Examples and recommendations adapted from [NCTE's Statement on Gender and Language](#)

and apprise students accordingly, contextualizing differences among language authorities in a larger, ongoing discussion of language and usage as dynamic and evolving, not absolute or static.

- There is not as yet sufficient literature regarding how to score psycological tests with transgender, nonbinary, or gender diverse youth. Nor how to navigate instruments that utilize gendered data scales normed usind cisgender individuals. However, the American Psychological Association does offer best practices when working with these clients. Make sure to be transparent with students about what choices you make both in selecting and scoring their assessments to help prevent harm when they see that parts of their assessments may not reflect their gender identity.

*Regarding Classroom and School Culture[3]*

- Work to establish and maintain classrooms and school communities where students of all gender and sexual identities feel visible, heard, valued, and protected. This includes:
    - Give students an opportunity to share with you their names and pronouns from the beginning including where they may not be comfortable having their chosen names or true gender markers used. Here's an example.
    - Avoid putting transgender or nonbinary students in the position to teach you or peers about their identity
    - Developing a school-wide protocol for communicating specified names and pronouns to substitute teachers when a student's name is different from the class roster
    - Interrupting when anyone misgenders or misnames students
    - Creating "teachable moments" when language, slurs, or bullying occur that contribute to hostile learning environments
    - Calling attention to gender stereotypes in classroom activities, materials, and language.
    - Ensure forms include a non-binary option under gender and inclusve family terms (ex. caregiver 1 and caregiver 2 instead of mother and father)

- Instead of saying "preferred" pronouns say "personal" pronouns. Pronouns are a powerful way to recognize a student's gender self-determination. They are not a "preference."

- As any student does, LGBTQ students have a right to privacy, which includes the right not to be "outed." It is imperative to respect a student's privacy and keep knowledge of sexual orientation or gender identity confidential. An LGBTQ+ student may or may not feel comfortable or safe having their sexual orientation or gender identity known in all contexts. They also may not use the same pronouns in all contexts, even across your school. Maintain confidentiality, attentiveness, and discretion in communicating with and about the student, and do not disclose a

---

[3]  Examples and recommendations adapted from NCTE's Statement on Gender and Language

student's gender identity or sexual orientation in any setting without the student's prior and clear consent.

- As early as possible in any given term, give each student a private way to let you know their name and pronouns. This could be as simple as including the following questions on a [basic student information sheet](#) or providing index cards a student can fill out confidentially:
  - "What name would you like me to call you?"
  - "What pronouns would you like me to use?"
  - "Who can I share this name and/or pronoun with (Just this class? With other adults? With caregivers/family? etc.)"

- Like other elements of identity, a student's gender identity may be fluid rather than static, staff should remain open to possible shifts in a student's declared name or pronouns.

- Remember queer and trans identities are **not** restricted to certain groups of folks. Your queer and trans students may hold many marginalized identities including racial, ethnic, neurodivergence, disability, imigration status, or being systems involved.

> **FAQ: What do you do if you misgender someone?**
> Honest and sincere mistakes are a normal part of the learning process when using new/different pronouns. Always apologize and immediately use the correct pronoun. Persistent, consistent and/or intentional use of the wrong pronoun is considered a form of bullying and harassment.

## Resources to Explore

*Teacher Background*

- [Gender Spectrum Overview](#) (Teaching Tolerance)
- [Gender Unicorn](#) (Trans Student Educator Resources)
- [Everyone Uses Singular 'They,' Whether They Realize It Or Not](#) (NPR's Fresh Air)
- [Even A Grammar Geezer Like Me Can Get Used To Gender Neutral Pronouns](#) (NPR's Fresh Air)
- [NCTE Additional Resources on Usage](#)
- [NCTE Additional Resources for Addressing Gender Diversity with Students](#)
- [NCTE List of Advocacy Organizations](#)

*Curriculum Tools & Resources*

- [LGBTQ Family + Gender Diversity Elementary Teaching Guide](#) (SFUSD)
- [Principles of Gender Inclusive Puberty and Health Education](#) (Gender Spectrum)
- [Gender Inclusive Schools Tool Kit ( pg. 31/32, 23/24)](#) (Gender Spectrum)
- [Gender Inclusive Classrooms: Concepts and Lessons](#) (Gender Spectrum)

*[SFUSD Inclusive Form/Communication Guidelines - District-Wide](#)*

## References

*The Associated Press Stylebook.* The Associated Press, 2018.
*The Chicago Manual of Style.* 17th ed., The University of Chicago Press, 2017.
Collins, Cory. "LGBTQ Best Practices Guide." *Teaching Tolerance,* Fall 2018, pp. 24-26.
"Guidelines for the Gender-Fair Use of Language." NCTE, 2002.
Nonbinary Gender Pronouns - University of Minnesota

## SFUSD Professional Development

Search for more Health Education and Socio-Emotional Learning training opportunities during th2 2019-2020 school year. LGBTQ Support Services is also available to provide training at your school site. Reach out to LGBTQ@sfusd.edu for more information.

## Additional Support

*LGBTQ Student Services, Student & Family Services Division*

If you have questions about how to support an LGBTQ student or family, reach out to your school social worker, Wellness Center or LGBTQ Student Services (LGBTQ@sfusd.edu). Also, visit our SFUSD employee webpage for more resources.

*Curriculum & Instruction Division*

Want to request additional support? Fill out this form and let the central office know what you need.

## Appreciations

Special thanks to the following people and groups who contributed to this guide with their writing, editing and feedback:

Erik Martinez  (he, him, his)
Kena Hazelwood (ey, em, eirs)
Kevin Gogin (he, him, his)
Mauro Sifuentes (any and all pronouns)
SFUSD Queer Trans Advisory Council
SFUSD High School E/LA Department Chairs
Suzy de Blois (she, her, hers)