



# A PARENT'S QUICK GUIDE FOR IN-SCHOOL TRANSITIONS:

Empowering Families and Schools to Support Transgender and Non-Binary Students

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**“ Before I attended my first meeting with the school, I made sure to write a letter, in which I stated my expectations for how I would like my son to be treated. Luckily, the principal and the school counselor had previous experience and a social transition plan in place. They were able to guide us safely and supportively through the process. ”**

**—Lizette Trujillo**

HRC Parents for Transgender  
Equality National Council Member

In-school social transitions can present challenges to even the most supportive parents and caregivers. This guide is intended to offer a quick reference for parents through the process, in a step-by-step manner. It is separated into three sections: Considerations before approaching the school; how to navigate discussions with the school and the tools to bring with you; and finally, some best practices for dealing with any resistance from the school community.

Underscored throughout this guide is the importance of knowing what your child's rights are while in school. Parents and caregivers may find themselves, depending on circumstances, having to play a more active role in “educating the educators,” as to what the school needs to do to support and provide a safe, affirming environment for transgender and non-binary students. An understanding of your child's rights is key to this process, as well as being prepared for discussions about your child's individual needs for privacy and support. There is no “one size fits all,” transition plan as there is no single path for a transition. What is important is to have a plan, and to be as deliberative as possible in creating it.



“ For non-binary kids, it’s incredibly important to have all-gender restrooms available to all students. Gendered restrooms may not feel safe, and it’s really stigmatizing to have to use the staff or nurse’s restroom. This causes even greater anxiety and stress for non-binary kids. ”

—Amy and Ash

Parents of a non-binary child

“ The school told me that I had a right to privacy and that I didn’t need to talk to anyone if I didn’t feel comfortable. This was such a relief for our family. ”

—Lizette Trujillo

HRC Parents for Transgender  
Equality National Council Member

## PART I: Planning Ahead

### Finding Support

Take the time to find support in your area. Nearly every state has a [PFLAG](#) chapter or transgender or non-binary parent support group. These folks can be an invaluable resource to ease your journey. If you are new to a school or school district, you can often find people in the community who can let you know who the most affirming educators, educator support professionals and administrators are in your child’s school or school district. This will help you work with the school to protect your child’s privacy while ensuring that they have an anchor staff person who checks in with your child and advocates for their well-being. There are also large parent groups on Facebook that serve as a resource and support for parents and caregivers of transgender and non-binary children and youth.

### Know Your Child’s Rights: Laws and Policies

Your child has a right to privacy and to an education free from discrimination, not just in theory, but through several levels of legal protection — federal, and in some cases, state and local laws. It is important to familiarize yourself with these laws and how they will impact your child’s transition in school.

It is a violation of your child’s rights to force them to use a single-user restroom, or the restroom in the nurse’s office as their only restroom option. If the only gender neutral restroom is in the nurse’s office, it is not always easily accessible and may further alienate the student and cause them to stand out as different among their peers. Best practice is for every school to have all-gender restrooms and binary restrooms (female and male) that are available to all students in the school so they can use the facilities that they feel most comfortable and safe using. If a school does not have all-gender restroom options for students, it is highly suggested that the single-user restrooms be re-designated as all-gender restrooms by updating the signage on the doors. All-gender restrooms allow for anyone to use the facility regardless of their gender identity and provides options for those who often feel unsafe in multi-stall restrooms. Single-user restrooms often already exist in schools — such as staff restrooms or the restroom in the health office.

**Federal Laws and Constitutional Rights:** [This handout](#) can be shared with your school. It is a comprehensive summary of supportive federal laws and constitutional rights for transgender students, including FERPA (Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act), the Equal Educational Opportunities Act and constitutional privacy protections which all cover a student’s transgender or non-binary status, their legal name and sex assigned at birth as confidential medical information.

In addition, decades of case law have interpreted federal sex non-discrimination laws, including Title IX protections “on the basis of sex” in education, to provide protection on the basis of gender identity. With the recent Supreme Court ruling in [Bostock v. Clayton County](#) that both sexual orientation and gender identity are covered under Title VII’s sex non-discrimination provision, families should have even more confidence asserting those protections for their gender non-conforming, non-binary and transgender children.

**State & Municipal Laws:** Several states and municipalities have also enumerated specific non-discrimination laws that forbid any kind of discrimination against LGBTQ students — most notably from staff — in a school setting. Under these laws,

students must be allowed to take part in school clubs, activities and events such as prom, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender expression or gender identity. Parents can search for state-specific laws on bullying, non-discrimination and sports at [GLSEN.org/policy-maps](https://www.glsen.org/policy-maps). HRC also has a helpful tool to guide you at [State Maps of Laws & Policies](#).

**School/School District Policies:** It is important for parents to know what their child's school and school district non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies state. Many school districts will have strong non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies, while others might need to be expanded. Best practice is that these policies specifically name sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression (actual or perceived) as protected groups. [National PTA has a Resolution: Recognition of LGBTQ Individuals as a Protected Class](#) that may be helpful to you in advocating for inclusive, enumerated language.

Enumeration is necessary to protect all students, as research has consistently shown that students experience less bullying and feel safer overall, and that teachers are more likely to intervene to prevent incidents of bullying, in schools with enumerated policies. Districts and schools should have this information available on their website, and if not, by request. This should also include district employees. It is important to note that private or parochial schools that do not receive federal funding do not have to adhere to federal non-discrimination policies.

**Model Guidances to Support Transgender, Non-Binary and Gender Expansive Students:**

[Boulder Valley School District: Guidelines Regarding the Support of Students and Staff Who Are Transgender and/or Gender Non-conforming](#)

Based on the conversations you will have had with your child, you will be prepared to discuss what your child's privacy needs, identification needs (both in the classroom and on paper) and gender-specific facilities needs are (restrooms and locker rooms). Not all families can, or wish to, pursue a legal name or gender marker change, which according to FERPA guidelines, would require the school to update both official and unofficial school records and documents.

The [National Center for Transgender Equality](#) has an ID documents center to help you know the laws and policies for name and gender changes at the federal and state level. Depending on your specific child's needs and identity, parents and caregivers should be prepared to discuss ways the school can update rosters, IDs, lunch cards, yearbooks, standardized tests and any other official school communications. A legal name or gender change is not required for schools to make these changes/updates.

Parents and caregivers can advocate for their school district to add a column for the name all students want to be called in their school information system. In addition, it is important to push school districts to add pronouns into the school information systems, including they/them.

## Create a Plan with your Child Before Meeting with the School

**Before addressing the school, it is important to assess your child's specific needs regarding their transition.**

Regardless of age, having a conversation with your child that covers basic transition-related topics will help you frame requests to the school, and guide you in protecting and affirming your child's rights.

It should be noted that one of the challenging aspects of formulating a plan for a younger child is that their need for privacy may evolve as they grow older. Talk with your child about consent and sharing — let them know that their gender journey is private and they get to decide if and when people know about this part of who they are. Your child has the right to talk about their gender identity, but staff members in the school do not unless you specifically grant them this privilege.

The [Gender Support Checklist for Transgender and Non-Binary Students](#) is a tool that you can use with both your child and the school to provide a guide for their transition. [Schools In Transition](#) also has a template.

Below are some key components of transition plans with questions that you will want to discuss with your child before meeting with the school. The plan can be revised at any time with your anchor staff team as your child settles into school.

**“The school did not have procedures in place when our daughter transitioned, so they deferred to our judgment a great deal on how to handle things. It is a continuous process of education (for both others AND yourself) long after the initial transition, and you must hold firm to what you believe is in the best interest of your child.”**

**—Erick Smith**

HRC Parents for Transgender  
Equality Council National Member

### NAMES AND PRONOUNS

- + “What would you like people to call you at school?”
- + “What pronouns should they use?” (If your child uses pronouns.)
- + Some middle school and high school students may only feel safe using their name and pronouns in affirming classes. Center the student in these decisions and check-in regularly for changes.

### GENDERED FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES

- + “What restrooms do you want to use at school?”
- + “If there is a gender-specific sports team or activity, which one would you like to join?”
- + “What locker room would you feel comfortable using?”
- + “Do you want to wear PE clothes to school or partially change? We can make this part of your plan.”
- + “What style of suit do you want to wear for swimming?”

### PRIVACY AND ANCHOR STAFF

- + “With whom would you like to share that you are transgender/non-binary (if anyone)?” Examples include: teachers, classmates... Many children may just want to live as their affirmed gender at school and not be out as transgender.

If your student knows the staff at the school:

- + “Is there a teacher or staff member whom you trust?”
- + “Is there an adult that you would feel safe going to if someone bullied you, or you were upset about something relating to gender?”

**“ My parents and teachers were very supportive of my transition at school. Some teachers even helped me explain my pronouns. My transition was overall a positive experience because of my counselor’s, teachers’ and parents’ support. ”**

**–Quinn Parke**

17 year-old non-binary student

## **YOUR CHILD’S TIMELINE**

A transition timeline will be affected by your child’s sense of urgency about their transition, and what is most important for them to achieve during the transition. Ideally, the school will already have an inclusive policy in place when your child is ready to transition. If they do, request a meeting with key administrators, such as the principal and guidance counselor, to go over your transition plan. In some schools, a student’s transition can be accommodated smoothly in a few days, in others; several meetings may be needed and the transition process can take several weeks. In either case, going over the plan with your child will be an important first step to determine what their needs are. It should be noted that the school does not get to determine the timeline for a student’s transition. The student’s desires and needs must be centered and the school must support that student. It is not okay for a school to ask a student to delay their transition until the school is “ready.” Ideally, families and schools are cooperative partners in this journey and it is planned skillfully with the student’s well-being at the center.

Practically, this may look different for different children. One student may experience extreme dysphoria around their name and insist on using a new name immediately, but may be okay with taking a few weeks before using a restroom aligned with their gender identity. For another child, feeling safe in the restroom that corresponds with their gender identity may be the first and most absolute need, but they may allow for an adjustment period regarding names and pronouns. Most other aspects of the transition plan should also be tailored to the student, especially when it comes to the individual student’s privacy needs, their particular gender and pronouns and what facilities they will use.

A student transitioning is not cause for a 504 Plan or IEP, as being LGBTQ is not a disability. However, if your child already has a 504 Plan or IEP, supports and accommodations for their gender transition can be included in these plans. It is important to know that 504s and IEPs are part of a student’s permanent record, so any information about a student’s gender identity will be available to all staff who serve that student.



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## PART II: Communicating with the School and Formulating a Transition Plan

Successful transition plans are documented and detailed plans to help the student and the school achieve the safest, most positive experience out of a transition. Transition plans are NOT part of a student's permanent record because gender information is confidential and should not generally be available to all staff members. One staff member, usually a school social worker or school psychologist, should keep the plan for the school year and shred it before the summer. Some students will want a plan for part of the school year, with a mid-year check in, while others may want to plan for the whole year. If things go smoothly, a student may only need/want a plan for the school year that they socially transition.

These plans will include components such as what the student requires (usually, in terms of name, pronouns, use of facilities, privacy), who this information will be shared with, when each piece of the transition will be rolled out and how the student and/or staff members will react and communicate if something goes "wrong," or the student needs additional help. The formulated plan should correspond to the individual child's needs, as determined by the conversations between parents or caregivers and the child. Most teams only involve 2-3 staff members who must protect the student's privacy and confidentiality.

**Another important aspect of a transition plan does not directly relate to the individual student at all. It is the formulation of a professional development plan to train, educate and inform staff, other parents and caregivers and students on creating gender-inclusive schools that support and affirm transgender and non-binary students.**

All schools need this critical training and it needs to be made clear that there will be no mention of individual students during the training; gender-inclusive schools benefit all students. The [Welcoming Schools](#) program offers professional development training for PK-12 schools on these topics. It is important that parents and caregivers communicate to the school that their child should not be used as the "teachable moment," but rather that diversity and inclusivity are goals to strive for outside of your individual student's needs for every child.

### Transition Plan Questions for Schools

#### SCHOOL DATABASE PLANS

- + Does the school have a column for names all students want to be called in the school database system?
- + Does the school database have a column for pronouns (if students use them), including they/them pronouns?
- + Does the district have a contact person or form for database changes?

#### GENDERED FACILITIES AND ACTIVITIES

- + Does the school have all-gender restrooms as well as female and male restrooms that are available to all students?
- + Will a staff member coordinate support for field trips and/or overnight school trips?

- + Will a staff member support my child in being fully included in gendered sports aligned with their gender identity? Who will that be? How will we best be able to stay in communication with them?

### PRIVACY AND ANCHOR STAFF

- + Will the school designate one or two primary support people for my child who will check in with them at least once a week? How will we best be able to stay in communication with them?
- + Who would follow through and develop a plan if bullying or harassment occurred?
- + **Note to parents and caregivers:** Make sure to articulate your privacy needs for both your child and your family. The school does not have permission to share information with staff, students or families without your consent. Be clear about your expectations in this regard.

### DRESS CODES AND GENDER EXPRESSION

- + Does the school have an inclusive gender-neutral dress code?
- + [Portland Public Schools](#) has a model dress code that is free of gender and racial bias.

### TIPS FOR VIRTUAL LEARNING

- + Parents and caregivers can ask educators to ensure that the correct name and pronouns appear for students in virtual class meetings — and if the system does not allow for alternative names or nicknames, they can use first initials for all students which can be less upsetting to a trans student.
  - If only legal names can appear on class rosters, ask the educators to take care not to use the student's name out loud when calling roll or to share their screen when the roster is in view.
  - Install a browser extension (such as “Deadname Remover” for Chrome) that will replace the offensive name on the student's computer and replace it with a name of their choice.
  - All online learning systems allow for customizing names and including pronouns. You can contact your school counselor or the administrator's office to request this change.
- + Are educators asking all students the name and pronouns that they want to be called?

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- + Is the school planning professional development and training for all staff about gender-inclusive schools and supporting transgender and non-binary students, while protecting my child's confidentiality?
- + **Note:** This checklist may be helpful to bring to your meeting: [Developing A Gender-inclusive School](#).

### POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- + Are staff aware of policies and procedures to support transgender and non-binary students?
- + Are staff aware of anti-bullying/harassment policies?

“When speaking with a school on behalf of a trans or non-binary student, I remind schools that policies that allow for freedom in gender expression benefit not only trans and non-binary students, but all students who may wish to express themselves in ways considered gender non-conforming, but fear harassment.”

—Mimi Lemay

parent, author and HRC Parents for Transgender Equality National Council Member



## **How to Form a Positive Partnership with Schools: Leading with Strength, Purpose and Resources**

Parents and caregivers have a role in setting the tone of conversations with school partners. Many have found it helpful to speak in a tone that communicates the non-negotiable nature of their child's needs and rights, while at the same time indicating that they are willing to work with the school to determine a plan and pace that meets the child's needs in partnership with the school.

**Conversations have a greater chance of succeeding when schools are reminded that meeting a transgender or non-binary student's needs aligns with their overall mission to provide for the health and safety of all students.**

Many times, schools want to do the right thing, but have not received the proper professional development and resources to do so.

### **Part III: Dealing with Resistance**

Despite understanding your child's needs, and having come to the school equipped with a transition plan and the resources you need to help implement it successfully, you may encounter push-back from the school. This could be because you live in a conservative community or state that does not have enumerated protections, or it could be from a lack of knowledge or familiarity on the part of the school with supporting a transition. Sometimes, opposition resides in objections based on a particular understanding of a religious practice and values.

It is possible that a school administrator will put up resistance to your requests to support your child, not because of a personal animus or discriminatory belief system, but out of fear. They are afraid of getting something wrong and seeing your child hurt or upset. Or they are afraid of "rocking the boat" in the community and receiving an influx of negative feedback. Remind them that hundreds of other schools have handled transitioning students and have created affirming school climates already. Ask them to reach out to other administrators and educators to get the guidance they need to move forward with confidence. The burden of this should not fall on your family. As mentioned earlier, professional development can be critical to help schools do their jobs better.



## Ways to respond to push-back:

Following are a collection of commonly heard objections and some useful responses. You will note that these responses are formulated to either remind schools of your child's legal rights, or of their overarching and stated responsibility to keep all children safe and supported in the school environment.

**“It will take a long time for people to adjust to a new name and pronouns. Don't expect everyone to switch right away.”**

*“There are easy ways to encourage people to learn... have teachers and students wear name tags with their names and pronouns on them for a few weeks. It will set the tone that you expect everyone to make the effort together to support my child.”*

**“We can't call your child by a different name unless you get a legal change with a court order.”**

*“Do any of the students go by their initials? Or middle name? Or even a nickname? I understand if their permanent record can't be changed right away, but there are ways to use a different name in the classroom, on the enrollment page or the lunch card. It's a matter of respect, privacy and safety.”*

**“I'm not sure our school is ready for this. I worry your child will be bullied if they do transition.”**

*“Then please update your anti-bullying policy, bring in additional speakers to talk about bullying and train staff in how to intervene and create a gender-inclusive school. No student should be bullied, so if that's your concern, I hope you would make improvements regardless of the reason they are being bullied.”*

**“We can work with you on names and pronouns, but not with restrooms. There is no way we can ensure your child would be safe.”**

*“Are you saying your restrooms are a safety issue? It is your job to ensure that all spaces in your school and all students attending are safe. How can you remedy that?”*

*“I am sure you are working with your students on respectful behavior in all settings throughout this school. My child has the right to take care of their body at school just like every other student.”*

*“We all have all-gender bathrooms in our homes. It has never been a problem.”*

**“We have a teacher who believes God made man and woman and cites their religious objection to affirming your child. They say it would be a lie to use the pronouns that they know are wrong for X's sex.”**

*“No one is asking that teacher to change their beliefs at home, but this is a public school and at school they have a professional ethic of care to ensure that every child feels safe and affirmed in their classroom. If the teacher will not respect my child, I expect you to ensure they never have any interactions. I would also expect you to give professional development to your educators so that they know your expectations.”*

**“All-gender restrooms give gender non-conforming and non-binary youth the privacy and safety to use the restroom without having to out themselves every time they need to go.”**

**—Jennifer Solomon**

PFLAG South Miami Chapter Founder &  
President and HRC Parents for Transgender  
Equality National Council Member



Sample letters to send to your child's school can be found on HRC's website [here](#) and [here](#).

## Conclusion

The purpose of this quick reference guide is to help parents and caregivers of transgender and non-binary students to successfully navigate an in-school transition. In-school transitions can be challenging and knowing your child's needs and rights is essential to this deliberative process. Communicating with the school in a manner that is strong yet collaborative can help build alliances and promote a school environment that is safe and supportive for all gender non-conforming students.

Affirming your transgender or non-binary student can seem overwhelming but it is critical and often, life-saving. It's important for families to know that others have done this before, and shared their collective knowledge. You are not alone.

## Links To Resources

### FINDING SUPPORT:

- + [Gender Spectrum](#)
- + [PFLAG](#)
- + [TransFamilies](#)

### KNOW YOUR CHILD'S RIGHTS - LAWS AND POLICIES:

- + [FERPA](#)
- + [GLSEN State Policy Map](#)
- + [HRC State Maps of Laws & Policies](#)
- + [National Center for Trans Equality ID Documents Center](#)
- + [National PTA Resolution: Recognition of LGBTQ Individuals as a Protected Class](#)
- + [Welcoming Schools Summary of Supportive Federal Laws and Constitutional Rights for Transgender Students](#)

### GENDER SUPPORT PLANS AND CHECKLISTS:

- + [Welcoming Schools Gender Support Checklist for Transgender and Non-Binary Students](#)
- + [Schools In Transition Gender Support Plan Template](#)

### MODEL DRESS CODES:

- + [Portland Public Schools Model Student Dress Code](#)

### MODEL GUIDANCES TO SUPPORT TRANSGENDER, NON-BINARY AND GENDER EXPANSIVE STUDENTS:

- + [Boulder Valley School District: Guidelines Regarding the Support of Students and Staff Who Are Transgender and/or Gender Non-conforming](#)

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES:

- + [Welcoming Schools Professional Development](#)
- + [Welcoming Schools Checklist for Developing A Gender-inclusive School](#)