ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH

Trans-Affirming Schools Project Resource Guide

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About Advocates for Youth

Advocates for Youth (Advocates) envisions a society in which all young people are valued, respected, and treated with dignity; sexuality is accepted as a healthy part of being human; and youth sexual development is normalized and embraced. In such a world, all youth and young adults are celebrated for who they are and afforded honest, affirming, inclusive sex education; access to confidential, universal sexual health services; and the economic, educational, and social power to exercise their bodily autonomy and make informed decisions regarding their health and well-being.

www.advocatesforyouth.org

Advocates' Rights, Respect, Responsibility philosophy underpins all of the organization's work:

Rights: Youth have the inalienable right to honest, inclusive sex education; confidential, universal sexual health services; and the economic, political, and social power that supports their agency, bodily autonomy, and self-determination.

Respect: Youth are due respect. They are leading the fight for equity and justice. Young people must be meaningfully involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of systems, policies and programs that affect their health and well-being.

Responsibility: Society has the responsibility to examine and dismantle systems of oppression that drive sexual health disparities and other inequities and to instead champion community initiatives, programs, policies, and systems that ensure equity and justice for all young people, their families and communities.

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Overview & Background

Key Terms & Definitions

This guide centers racial justice and liberation for Black and Brown youth though it was designed to meet the needs of all youth in our U.S. schools. A complete list of terms and definitions can be found in the Glossary of Terms in the back of this guide.

Throughout this guide you will see the phrase "transgender, nonbinary and gender-expansive" shortened as the acronym TNGE.

disinformation
False information deliberately spread to deceive. Disinformation is sometimes confused with misinformation, which is false information but is not deliberate.

racial justice
The systematic fair treatment of people of all races, resulting in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all. Racial justice goes beyond "anti-racism." It is not just the absence of discrimination and inequities, but also the presence of deliberate systems and supports to achieve and sustain racial equity through proactive and preventative measures.

racism
Historically rooted system of power hierarchies based on race — infused in our institutions, policies and culture — that benefits white people and hurts Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color (BIPOC). Racism isn't limited to individual acts of prejudice, either deliberate or accidental. Rather, the most damaging racism is built into systems and institutions that shape our lives. Most coverage of race and racism is not "systemically aware," meaning that it either focuses on racism at the level of an individuals' speech or actions, dismisses systemic racism, or refers to racism in the past tense.

white supremacy
A form of racism centered upon the belief that white people are superior to people of other racial backgrounds and that white people should politically, economically, and socially dominate non-white people. While often associated with violence perpetrated by the KKK and other white supremacist groups, it also describes a political ideology and systemic oppression that perpetuates and maintains the social, political, historical and/or industrial white domination.

Letter from a Black Parent Activist of a Transgender Youth

Dear Family,

My name is nadeen herring. My pronouns are she/her/queen. I am a Black and proud, assertive and loud womxn, seasoned educator (K-college), author and most important - mother to an amazing transgender young man - and his three older brothers - who is prepared to graduate from high school next year. In 2021, I created blaq noyz, LLC - where I consult with families, collaborate with LGBTQIA+ community/business leaders and facilitate trainings to schools and corporate entities on re-imagining, thus creating, safer spaces for not just trans/gender-diverse human beings, but ALL children and stakeholders in their midst. I also partner with entities like Advocates for Youth because lives - Black and Brown trans lives, specifically - are at stake and largely ignored. I behold privileges (i.e., cis-gender, heterosexual, able-bodied...) where allyship is not enough; I *have* to affirm my child and others like him by speaking out, showing up and shutting down those who haphazardly violate their lives in an effort to erase their person, our history and truth because of fear and status-quo ignorance.

My child - who was assigned female at birth - came to me around the age of 7 with an important declaration. He stated, "I AM a boy." I remember it like it was an hour ago. So many emotions and questions/thoughts rushed my whole body:

- What did *I* do?
- Is she really just gay? A tomboy?
- This is some white people mess! What's going on?
- What will my family say?
- What will my co-workers and his teachers think?

Yes, I only thought about myself. Not one of those questions had anything to do with my son. Here I was, a veteran educator of 25+ years and an involved mother who was having an inner meltdown and didn't have a sane leg to stand on. Unfortunately, even with my high-falutin education (Spelman College and Columbia University) my so–called familiarity with LGBT realities (I have an aunt who is gay but we don't talk about it) and my "knowing" the needs of children, I was about to destroy my own child's life. But **he** saved all of us.

How? He spoke. I listened. He taught. I learned.

That's the key. We have to risk going against the grain of our home teachings of "be seen, not heard", because as long as we silence our children and convince them that they don't know what they're talking about or who they are, we are setting them up for the wolves that are already lurking to destroy what little we leave of our children to fend for themselves unsuccessfully.

Our Black and Brown children enter this world with a scarlet letter on them. We know this well. What we cannot always appreciate is that we can easily become their first bully by ignoring the very foundation of how they interpret this world and how they will live in it. And unfortunately, that foundation is identity and sexuality - parts of ourselves that our family dynamics do not allow for exploration. After all, how many holiday tables have we sat at, year after year, only to know who is gay, queer or trans but portray these family members as "secrets" instead of exploring our own sense of identity and sexuality first, in order to fully accept, love and respect?

I have to be very clear, because like you, I sometimes forget that I live in a land where the Global Minority (white people) re-writes history. I'm not offering an in-depth history lesson (I'm still learning!), but at least know these two things:

- Our indigenous extended family has always recognized transgender folx - as far back as B.C. times! (i.e., Two-Spirit, Muxe and 3rd-gender acknowledgement in many of our African and Global Majority nations)
- White supremacy/patriarchy and colonization attacked and rid the originality and normality of non-binary truths and transgender/intersex people in order to fit their comforts and binary preferences.

Bottom line, our transgender Black and Brown children are NOT an abomination. They are not abnormal. They are not following the lead of white people's shenanigans. They are our children, created out of love and necessity with a purpose. And what is most beautiful is that we were chosen to love, lead and encourage our children to live their truth IN SPITE OF all the intersections of themselves (Black only being one of many) that are routinely dismissed, disrespected and exploited. Even if we weren't afforded the same opportunities when we were exploring our own identities, we can right the wrong(s). I did.

We parents are the key.

I didn't know the facts. I had no idea of what well-rounded support looked like. But what I did know how to do was ask my child questions. I learned that I could be honest with him and admit that I didn't understand. I learned that it wasn't fair to burden my child to do all the work. If I wanted to be a more-supportive parent and if I wanted my child to live (my child suffered depression because of family and friends' rejection), I had no choice but to demand medical intervention; no choice but to get therapy for myself and seek refuge and community with other Black folx who were walking a similar path; no choice but to know that I could not allow the other's twisted opinions and sickness to snuff my child's existence. My son is here for a reason - and it has nothing to do with his being trans.

The most important message I need for you to hold onto is this: You don't have to understand all of what your trans/non-binary/queer/gender-diverse child endures. But what you **must** do is continue to love, love on, respect and see your child for whom they say they are. That is not up for negotiation. Our Black and Brown children are attacked from all sides, all day, every day. This is a matter of life and death. I am not exaggerating. Our children are having suicidal ideation and trying to end their lives at a faster rate than that of their white counterparts. And this is all because who they are goes against yesterday's Black teachings and today's Black posturing. We can and need to do better. Please.

We have many organizations to help our families walk this path; however, we Black and Brown parents are obligated to start the magic at home first and foremost. My son and I have battled this path together for over 10 years. And we both know that the battle is not all won. But what we do know is that we have each other's backs and there is no one or anything that can come for us as long as we remain committed to ourselves as a team.

Please commit today to stand behind, in front of and for your child. Your child deserves to grow up to be an adult. Trans is such a minute part of your child. Feed the soul of your whole child. Our world needs them.

Peace.
nadeen "mothasistah" herring (she/her)
founder, **blaq noyz, LLC**

Letter to Supportive Adults

Dear Supportive Adult,

Janet Jackson's 1989 song *Livin' in a World (They Didn't Make)* described the violence and abuse young people faced as a result of the culture wars adults around them were fighting. Miss Jackson cautioned that our youth were living in a world filled with hate, and paying too high a price for the ignorance and immaturity of the adults who were responsible for them. The world has not changed for transgender, non-binary, and gender-expansive youth (TNGE), especially Black and Brown youth. The race, gender, and sexuality wars being waged in U.S. schools are landing blows to the bodies of our young people that they may not even see or understand. We are responsible for the TNGE youth in our schools who are living in an unsafe world they didn't make.

We can no longer tell our young people that it gets better - we must take responsibility for making it better for them and for us.

Hateful messaging, widespread misinformation and partisan politics threaten the promise of safety for our youth. While this has always been an emergency, an increasing number of policymakers have recently deepened their commitment to harm. Laws banning the teaching of gender and sexuality in schools, laws prohibiting gender-affirming care for youth, and laws excluding transgender students from participating in athletic programs have cropped up all over the country, and contribute to creating a culture and climate of fear, rejection, and oppression for youth and their families. Despite the clear recommendations from experts in health and education, we remain sharply divided on topics that should have already been settled by community guidance and medically accurate research findings.

The purpose of this guide is to equip K-12 educators with resources to build safer, more affirming school environments for TNGE youth. This guide is a contribution to our collective efforts to create braver spaces, safer schools, and a world that affirms ALL students.

With strength and gratitude,

Jaymie Campbell & Jabari Lyles

Purpose & How to Use this Guide

Transgender, non-binary, and gender-expansive identities are not something to be debated: Transgender, non-binary, and gender-expansive adults exist. Transgender, non-binary, and gender-expansive youth exist. We have always existed and we will continue to prevail. Leaders and lawmakers who have a responsibility to keep us safe and work in our best interests, whether by job description or sworn oath, are not. This guide was developed as a direct response to the onslaught of anti-transgender disinformation and legislation in the U.S.

Since the dawn of the "Gay Rights Movement," transgender, non-binary, and gender-expansive (TGNE) people have been silenced, erased, and de-centered from the discourse. Efforts to amplify our voices have left even the most seemingly devoted allies to still confuse gender identity with sexual orientation. Even using anti-racism and racial justice lenses to center the most marginalized voices has led to conversations filled with more questions than answers. We have taken the time to analyze what has already been created and have developed this guide as a map for youth-serving adults in schools to help TNGE young people find their way to safety, and hopefully to a joy-filled life.

This resource guide uses the theory of intersectionality – coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 - to refer specifically to the intersection of identities facing oppression. Crenshaw's groundbreaking theory of intersectionality has been used to similarly highlight the ways other communities face intersecting oppressions, such as transgender and queer Black and Brown youth. This guide centers Black and Brown young people and provides general practices that support all TNGE young people in schools. The needs of Black and Brown youth are centered throughout the contents to best contextualize the broader socio-political context of gender and sexuality in U.S. schools.

This resource guide also serves as a working document to answer some preliminary questions about gender identity and sexual orientation through a racial justice lens, but it will not answer every question, solve every problem, or respond to every need. Our vision for this guide, and the adults supporting young people who use it, is that rather than search several places for resources, this guide can serve as a foundational starting point that quickly connects to other community vetted information and support.

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History of the LGBTQ Inclusive Schools Movement

The fight for affirming and inclusive schools for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students has a long and storied history[32]. Language has shifted over the decades, hard-fought battles have been celebrated, and there is still more work to do to ensure the safety of transgender, non-binary, and gender-expansive young people in U.S. schools. Below is a snapshot of the movement over the past fifty years.

Suggestion: Use this timeline as an activity to teach your students about LGBTQ inclusive schools history!

1970 - New York City School District establishes a student bill of rights which allows students to "form political and social organizations, including those that champion unpopular causes." Multiple school districts across the country in the early 1970s adopted similar policies.

1972 - The 'Gay International Youth Society', the first known gender and sexuality alliance in the U.S., was formed at George Washington High School in New York City. The group, composed mostly of students of color, had three demands: "the right to form gay groups", "the right to be included and receive fair representation in any high school course dealing with sexuality", and "the right to be treated as equal human beings."

1984 - Project 10 was founded in Los Angeles, regarded as the country's first program to target anti-LGBTQ harassment in schools. Founded by Dr. Virginia Uribe, the group started with 25 students at Fairfax High School and eventually expanded to all schools in the LA Unified School District.

1985 - Harvey Milk High School, the world's first high school designed for LGBTQ youth, is founded in New York City.

1988 - Los Angeles Unified School Board passes a nondiscrimination resolution which includes "sexual orientation" in its list of protected categories.

1989 - The first groups to call themselves a "gay-straight alliance" are founded at two private schools in Massachusetts. The model was later adopted for the statewide safe schools program and served as a model for GSAs across the country.

1990 - Kevin Jennings and Kathy Henderson establish GLISTN: Gay and Lesbian Independent School Teacher Network. This coalition of educators would later become GLSEN, a national organization championing LGBTQ issues in K-12 schools across the country.

1991 - Los Angeles Unified Board of Education forms a "Gay and Lesbian Education Commission" to work on equal access to education for all LGBT students.

1994 - GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network becomes a national organization.

1996 - Kelli Peterson establishes the Gay/Straight Alliance at East High School in Salt Lake City, Utah. The city school board bans all "non-curricular" student clubs in order to keep the group from meeting.

1996 - The first Day of Silence was organized at the University of Virginia by Maria Pulzetti and Jessie Gilliam. Jessie later interned at the Center for Population Options, later known as Advocates for Youth, where they helped to expand the Day of Silence to other schools and universities. The event was later adopted as an official day of action by GLSEN, with thousands of youth participating across the country.

1998 – Advocates for Youth launches the first internet intervention for LGBTQ youth, Youth Resource, and its Spanish-language sister site, Ambiente Joven. The organization trains and supports LGBTQ peer educators to respond to thousands of questions received from young people about coming out, HIV, sexual orientation, gender identity, and more.

1999 - East High Gay/Straight Alliance v. Board of Education of Salt Lake City School District; judge rules school district is in violation of students' First Amendment rights to express gay-positive opinions at school.

1999 - GLSEN conducts its first National School Climate Survey to assess the experiences of LGBTQ youth with regards to their experiences of school-based harassment and victimization, the frequency with which LGBTQ students heard homophobic language in their schools, and their overall comfort in school. The survey is the first of its kind to examine the specific experiences of LGBTQ-identified youth in schools nationally.

1999 - The American Psychological Association, in partnership with 12 other national health and education organizations, publishes "Just the Facts about Sexual Orientation and Youth: A Primer for Principals, Educators, and School Personnel" which provides definitive guidance against the use of conversion therapy. The publication was later updated in 2008.

2000 - AB 537, or the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act, is signed into state law. The law adds protections to the California Education code including, "no person shall be discriminated against on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender."

2003 - San Francisco Unified School District becomes the first school district in the country to enact policy protections specific to transgender students. This groundbreaking policy was the first of its kind to affirm transgender students' rights to use school facilities, including bathrooms and locker rooms, consistent with their gender identity.

2004 - Vermont becomes the first state to pass an LGBT-inclusive anti-bullying law that includes protections on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.

2007 - Over 3,600 GSAs across the country are registered with GLSEN and Advocates for Youth launches the Anti-homophobia/Transphobia Project to provide information, resources and assistance to more than

400 schools and community-based organizations serving youth of color to help them make their programming more inclusive of LGBTQ-youth of color.

2011 - The United States Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan issues a statement clarifying that students have the right to form "gay-straight alliances" (GSAs) under the Equal Access Act of 1984 in any public school that allows non curricular student groups to form.

2012 - The Future of Sex Education Initiative, a collaboration of Advocates for Youth, Answer, and the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS), publishes the National Sex Education Standards: Core Content and Skills (NSES) in collaboration with the American School Health Association. The NSES are LGBTQ-inclusive and have been used by 42% of school districts to guide the sex education they provide, according to a CDC survey.

2012 - Advocates for Youth's All Students Count Coalition successfully advocates for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to approve a new, although optional, question on gender expression for use on the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Making history, this was the first time a federal population-based survey approved an appropriate survey item to allow assessment of gender expression and gender nonconformity, thereby allowing analysis of gender expansive students.

2014 - The All Students Count Coalition's research and advocacy led to, for the first time, more than half the participating states and the majority of the participating municipalities adding one or more questions concerning sexual orientation to their state surveys. In addition, the CDC added two optional sexual orientation questions to the standard and national Youth Risk Behavior Survey questionnaires.

2014 - The Department of Education issues official guidance to clarify that transgender students are protected from discrimination under Title IX, a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against students on the basis of sex in federally funded education programs and activities.

2014 - Gavin Grimm, a transgender high school student in Virginia, is barred from using the boy's restroom at school after complaints from parents at a school board meeting. With the help of the ACLU, Grimm sues his school district and the case is eventually heard in federal court. In 2020, the court ruled that the district violated Title IX and the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution's 14th Amendment. The case, G.G. v. Gloucester County School Board, delivers a powerful precedent on the side of transgender student rights.

2015 - For the first time, the sexual identity and sex of sexual contacts questions were added to the 2015 national and standard Youth Risk Behavior Survey questionnaires after successful advocacy and research efforts led by the All Students Count Coalition.

2016 - The first LGBTQ-inclusive K-12th grade comprehensive sex education curriculum - Rights, Respect, Responsibility - is published by Advocates for Youth. The curriculum is free to school districts around the country and its lesson plans were quickly adopted by more than 100 school districts, reaching more than three million students. In 2022, the curriculum becomes a lightning rod for the anti-gender movement.

2016 - The U.S. Department of Education, under the Obama administration, issues a "Dear Colleague" letter to schools, which provides guidance on enacting protections for transgender students in schools. The guidance would later be rescinded by the Trump administration in 2017.

2016 - California becomes the first state to officially add LGBTQ history to its history and social science curriculum.

2020 - The All Students Count Coalition released On All Sides: How Race & Gender Influence Health Risk for Transgender Students of Color which used Youth Risk Behavior Survey data to find that transgender students of color may be at greater risk for some behaviors.

2021 - The Safe Schools Improvement Act (SSIA) is introduced in the House of Representatives by Reps. Linda Sánchez (D-CA), John Katko (R-NY), and Mark Takano and in the Senate by Senator Bob Casey (D-PA). If passed, SSIA would amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to require school districts in states that receive ESEA funds to adopt codes of conduct specifically prohibiting bullying and harassment, including on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex - including sexual orientation and gender identity - disability, and religion. SSIA would also require that states report data on bullying and harassment to the Department of Education. The Department of Education would then be required to provide Congress with a report on the state reported data every two years.

2022 - The All Students Count Coalition developed several advocacy letters, webinars, and resources which led Youth Risk Behavior Survey Coordinators to overwhelmingly vote to add the transgender identity question to the 2023 national and standard Youth Risk Behavior Survey. In addition, the All Students Count Coalition released Exploring How Disparities in Experiences of Violence and Substance Use Between Transgender and Cisgender Students Differ by Gender Expression which found, with few exceptions, that transgender perceived feminine youth are most likely to experience health risks. Additionally, there are larger gaps between cisgender and transgender perceived feminine youth.

2022 - Governor Greg Abbott (R-TX) issues a directive to the Texas State Department of Family and Protective Services, urging the department to investigate parents and caregivers who pursue gender-affirming care for their children. The directive, supported by the Texas Attorney General, declares that gender-affirming care for TNGE youth is considered child abuse under Texas law. The governor calls on the general public and other health professionals to report parents who pursue transition-related care for their children, and threatens criminal consequences. The directive would later be halted by Judge Amy Clark Meachum, Texas District Court Judge.

2022 - Governor Ron DeSantis (R-FL) signs into law House Bill 1557, the Florida Parental Rights in Education Act, also known as the "Don't Say Gay" bill, which enacts several restrictive guidelines for Florida schools, including prohibition of discussing gender and sexuality in elementary school. Students and advocates nationwide respond with protests, walk-outs, and public disgust for the law.

2022 - In Foote v The Town of Ludlow, a federal judge ruled in favor of Ludlow schools in Massachusetts to affirm LGBTQ students by using their chosen name and pronouns.

Supporting Transgender, Non-binary, and Gender-expansive Youth in Schools

Understanding Gender Identity

Key Terms & Definitions

A complete list of terms and definitions can be found in the Glossary of Terms in the back of this guide.

assigned sex at birth
A medical label (female, male, or intersex) assigned to an infant at or before birth, based on the infant's reproductive traits, which includes consideration of internal and/or external genitalia, chromosomes, and hormones.

cisgender
A word to describe a person whose gender identity is congruent with (or "matches") the sex they were assigned at birth. (i.e., a person who is not transgender).

gender identity
One's inner knowledge and understanding of their own gender. Gender identity is something that is self-determined. Gender identity may or may not align with one's assigned sex at birth or one's gender expression.

non-binary (or nonbinary)
A gender identity which exists outside of, transcends, combines or rejects the gender binary. An umbrella term to describe any gender identity or expression which exists outside of the man/woman gender binary. Nonbinary people may or may not also identity as transgender.

transgender
An adjective used to describe a person whose gender identity is incongruent with (or does not "match") the sex they were assigned at birth. "Transgender" serves as an umbrella term to refer to the full range and diversity of identities within transgender communities. It is currently the most widely used and recognized term to refer to people of transgender experience.

Gender identity refers to the internal, enduring way a person identifies their gender. Some people identify with one gender, some identify with many genders, or some people identify as not having a gender at all. For some, gender identity can change throughout the course of one's life. A person's understanding of their gender identity can be informed by their family, friends, culture, religion, societal expectations, and more. How do you find out what name or pronoun to use to refer to someone so you don't misgender them? You can simply ask their name and pronoun, or start by introducing yours!

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Nonbinary gender identity is an identity in itself, and can also be understood as an umbrella category of any gender which does not fall within the gender binary. Labels such as genderqueer, gender nonconforming, agender, and genderfluid are all identities which fall within the category of nonbinary.

Expanding the traditional binary idea of gender is not new. Numerous cultures throughout history have long recognized gender-expansive identities. For example, "two-spirit" identity in Native American culture refers to someone who embodies the spirit and perspective of both men and women. According to the Indian Health Service, "in most tribes, [two-spirit people] were considered neither men nor women; they occupied a distinct, alternative gender status[48]."

While some arrive at a clear understanding of their gender identity later in life, many children and adolescents develop accurate understandings of their own gender at early ages.

Gender Identity in Children & Adolescents

Most typically, children between the ages of 18 months to 2-3 years begin to articulate some type of understanding of their gender identity [7, 74, 108, 109]. This age range also describes the developmental period when speech begins, and adults can start to hear how a child understands themself. Many documentaries and **YouTube videos** about transgender children illustrate their brilliance when they state with confidence at young ages, "I am a boy" or "Do not call me a 'girl.'"

General expressions of gender exploration in children are common and do not always indicate gender variance; however, sometimes a child can seem unusually stressed when it comes to gender. Parents and teachers alike wonder what telltale signs to look for in children that indicate it may be time to seek out a therapist or counselor who specializes in supporting children and adolescents around gender identity. The three signs a caregiver should consider when deciding to seek additional support are when a child is **insistent** about either not being the gender everyone is referring to them as or being a different gender, **consistent** - meaning this is a recurring issue that presents frequently, and **persistent** - meaning that the child's demands for different treatment are present and they may not be soothed until they are treated differently [6, 7, 108, 109]. This does not mean the child is transgender, but that the child may need support in understanding their internal experience.

When a child approaches puberty and during the years of puberty, it is common to explore gender identity and gender expression in deeper ways. This is also impacted by culture, society, peers, and family, as well as the hormonal shifts occurring physically in the body. It is important to note that puberty can be traumatizing for TNGE young people, and we strongly recommend guidance from a therapist or medical provider who specializes in working with TNGE youth.

Youth in Transition

Transition refers to the many aspects a person may engage in while processing their gender. Gender transition can refer to both the personal, reflective process of exploring one's gender identity and expression, as well as the process of sharing those reflections and information with others. In general, the three most common ways people discuss TNGE youth transitions are social, legal, and medical transitions.

SOCIAL. This is the most accessible form of transitioning for youth because it simply involves disclosing one's gender exploration to one or more people. An example of social transition is when a young person informs you that they would like a different name and/or pronoun used for them. They may or may not correct you and others when the outdated information is used to refer to them, but that does not mean they have approved the use of that outdated name and pronoun. **Asking to use a different name or pronoun is not an indication that a student is transgender; instead, it's an indication that someone has identified more accurate information about their identity and they are inviting you to respect them.** Sometimes people, especially youth who are at the developmentally appropriate age for exploring many identities, may change their name and pronoun multiple times. While it is unrealistic to expect perfection when addressing students by their affirming name and pronouns, sincere efforts must be made to reduce the frequency of mispronouncing and misidentifying TNGE students, and all students who ask to be addressed in respectful ways.

LEGAL. Legal transition refers to changing regulatory documents such as the gender marker or name on a birth certificate, identification card, social security card, or any other state or federally regulated document. The steps to legally change one's information vary by state depending on the document, and all states require appearance in court unless a court-approved reason for not appearing in person is granted. Legal transition also comes with a variety of fees and is not an option for every TNGE person.

MEDICAL. Medical transition refers to any type of hormonal or surgical interventions to improve the quality of a TNGE person's life. Access to medical transition services and resources also varies by state which presents major challenges for TNGE youth, and there are a range of costs associated with various treatments and procedures. Medical transition is not always covered by insurance and, even if some procedures are covered by insurance, the coverage is often not consistent, e.g. hormones and/or syringes being covered one month but not another.

One of the most important things to keep in mind when supporting a young person through gender transition is that they were most likely grappling with stress around gender before sharing information about their gender identity with trusted peers and adults. Therefore, i**t is essential to believe young people the first time they express a need for updated language such as a name or pronoun change, and every time they express a need for updated language.** Too often adults become frustrated when young people "change their name and pronoun too frequently," so it's important to keep in mind that transition is not a linear process with an easily defined beginning and end.

Transition is not essential to being transgender. You cannot tell from looking at a person whether or not they are exploring and/or questioning their gender – that involves a conversation and a young person may not feel comfortable disclosing to you. Instead of separating young people into those who have disclosed and those who have not, we need to not assume that students who outwardly express themselves as cisgender are anchored in their identities until they say otherwise. Instead, we can incorporate gender diversity into every aspect of teaching and supporting young people, and reduce the stress that may come with early thoughts and feelings about gender expansiveness.

Not every transgender, non-binary, or gender expansive person desires social, legal, or medical transition. Oftentimes, adults will judge young people by their choices to transition or not. Remember, it is a process and as educators and school administrators, we must be affirming every step of the way.

Young people often do not have resources, agency or autonomy over their decisions to transition socially, legally, and medically.

Social, legal, and medical transition can also involve high emotional costs such as the loss of friends, family, and community and these consequences can often be devastating. This is another reason why it is critical to support TNGE young people throughout their entire journey.

"It's not what they call you, it's what you answer to." -Miss Jaci Adams

The School's Role During Transitions

For many, transition is blissful, liberating, and empowering. For others, transition can be a challenging time, especially in the life of a TNGE young person. As children spend most of their time in school, it would follow that schools play an important role when a TNGE student transitions.

The school's role can sometimes be difficult to understand, as many schools are often forced to find a balance between the student's wishes, the parent's concerns, and the legal limitations of their district and state. It's important to remember that finding this balance and meeting the needs of TNGE youth in school will be different for each student. Rather than developing a one-size-fits-all approach, schools should equip themselves with general guiding principles and standards for supporting youth in transition.

General Guiding Principles for Supporting Youth in Transition:

1. Develop a tailored plan for each student. One TNGE student's journey will not be the same as another's, and it's important to review the unique factors affecting each student so the best plan for them is put in place.

2. Involve the TNGE student in all aspects of planning. Use shared-decision making when reviewing the logistics of the support plan. Shared-decision making means not making decisions or plans on the student's behalf, but having consent from the TNGE student when developing and strategizing safety and support.

3. Do not disclose a TNGE student's identity to others. A TNGE's student's identity is considered protected information.

4. Do not delay. TNGE youth never had a wealth of resources and the existing ones are under attack. Be proactive in attuning to the needs of TNGE students and connecting them with resources and support.

5. Be prepared to effectively address concerns from other students, colleagues, and parents. Anticipate questions and concerns and have your talking points ready. The Advocating for Gender Inclusivity in Schools section of this guide is a great way to prepare!

Common Question: When should I disclose to other students, teachers, and faculty that a student identifies as transgender, non-binary, or gender expansive?

Answer: Disclosing a student's gender identity without the student's enthusiastic consent is called "outing" the student, and may put the student in immediate or future danger. Best practices are to talk with the student and identify a plan about to whom and when to disclose, and steps for repair if you accidentally out the student to others prior to gaining consent.

Best Practices for Supporting TNGE Youth in Transition:

- Affirm the student by using their chosen name and gender pronouns
- Make administrative changes to documents and other materials to affirm the student's name and pronouns, regardless of a legal name or gender marker change
- Ensure the student has unencumbered access to facilities that feel best for them (i.e. bathrooms, locker rooms, changing areas, etc.)
- Inform the TNGE student of their rights and protections e.g. Title IX, Equal Access Act, and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act
- Ensure the student feels empowered to participate in the full school program, including extracurricular activities, field trips and athletics
- Create an environment where the student feels comfortable to explore different names, pronouns, clothing items, and personal styles
- Educate faculty and staff on the needs and experiences of TNGE youth, as well as the expectations for care
- Proactively teach the entire school community about gender identity, gender expansiveness, and celebrate LGBTQ history and culture
- Represent the student's needs and wishes to other stakeholders within the school community
- Facilitate conversations and make resource connections with parents, families and caregivers

Schools may consider developing a gender support plan which details roles, responsibilities, and expectations for a student's transition. According to *Schools in Transition*, schools must consider, "the student's age, personality and emotional state, the level of family support, the school's organizational design and even the time of year," when finding the right plan. For more in depth information on gender support plans and other important factors to consider when a student is in transition, view the full **Schools in Transition document here.**

Building Affirming and Inclusive Schools for Transgender, Non-binary, and Gender-expansive Youth

In 2022 alone, more than 300 anti-trans bills were introduced, including the "Don't Say Gay" bill in Florida. These hateful legislative actions create a hostile school environment for TNGE young people across the country[19].

Schools have become a battleground as parents and school districts disagree over curriculum content that should be included and taught in schools, particularly when it comes to race, gender, and sexuality.

Becoming a school that is welcoming and inclusive of TNGE students is more of an ongoing journey rather than a final destination. There will always be new challenges and new opportunities. Students, families, and knowledge about gender will evolve, as will the strategies for meeting the needs of your school community.

Gender Spectrum, an organization that works to create gender sensitive and inclusive environments for all children and teens, suggests four approaches to creating safer and more affirming school environments:

- **Internal:** one's own, personal knowledge and experience with gender

- **Interpersonal:** interactions, intentional behaviors and communications that reinforce the school's commitment to gender inclusion

- **Instructional:** teaching and learning within the school community to increase education and awareness of gender expansiveness

- **Institutional:** structural and systemic strategies for gender inclusion that are widely visible and standardized such as the availability of gender neutral bathrooms across all campuses (elementary, high school, other affiliated buildings), naming classrooms, hallways, buildings, and schools after prominent TNGE heroes, and implementing district wide policies allowing students to access gendered activities - sports, school trips, etc. - according to how students identify instead of what may be on their school records.

The Human Rights Campaign uses the *Welcoming Schools Framework for a Gender-Inclusive School* which suggests a similar approach, emphasizing the importance of institutional, relational and instructional strategies for gender inclusion.

For years, GLSEN has researched the needs and experiences of LGBTQ youth in K-12 schools. As a result of this groundbreaking research, four key interventions have surfaced, which have been proven through its research to be effective in making schools safer for LGBTQ students. Used in tandem with the areas listed above, schools can take concrete steps towards making sure everyone is working together to meet the needs of TNGE students, and it doesn't all fall on one teacher, administrator, or supportive staff member.

Four Key Interventions for Supporting TNGE Youth:

1. **Comprehensive, enumerated policies:** policies and procedures which are clearly listed and include specific protections and protocols for TNGE students.
2. **LGBTQ-inclusive curricula:** ensuring educators have support and guidance for including positive representations of TNGE people in their content areas, as well as throughout the school.
3. **Ongoing professional development training:** continuing education opportunities for teachers to learn specific strategies for building inclusive classrooms
4. **Support for student clubs such as Gender & Sexuality Alliances (GSAs):** establishing and maintaining a space for LGBTQ students to build community, organize and educate their school community.

GLSEN's Inclusive School Self-Assessment is an excellent tool for school leaders to evaluate their progress towards becoming a safer, more affirming school for LGBTQ youth. We suggest starting with their **school assessment** to develop a road map for your school's journey and your unique school community.

Data & Research on TNGE Youth in Schools

According to the 2021 GLSEN National School Climate Survey[38]:

Compared to their cisgender LGBQ peers, transgender and nonbinary students:
- Were more likely to have felt unsafe based on their gender and gender expression
- Experienced much higher levels of victimization based on their gender and gender expression
- Are more likely to report missing school because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable
- Reported lower levels of school belonging.

→ Transgender and nonbinary students experience discriminatory school policies and practices at higher rates than do their cisgender LGBQ peers.

→ **Over three quarters** (77.3%) of transgender students and 69.1% of nonbinary students reported having been discriminated against, compared to 46.1% of cisgender students.

→ Certain forms of discrimination are more specific to the experiences of transgender and nonbinary students, such as being prevented from using the bathroom consistent with one's gender identity. Specifically, many transgender and nonbinary students were:

- o   Required to use the bathroom of their legal sex
- o   Required to use the locker room of their legal sex
- o   Prevented from using their chosen name and pronouns
- o   Prevented from wearing clothing deemed "inappropriate" based on gender

→ A little over **4 in 10 transgender and nonbinary students** (41.6%) reported that their school administration was somewhat or very supportive of LGBTQ students.

→ Only **17.2%** of transgender and nonbinary students reported that they had been taught positive things about LGBTQ people, history, events or topics in any of their classes.

→ Only **14.4%** of transgender and nonbinary students reported that their school had a comprehensive anti-bullying school policy.

According to the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS), a biennial school-based survey of adolescents in grades 9 through 12 administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), *"Transgender perceived feminine"* students are more likely than all other groups to have been in a physical fight (on or off school property), been threatened with a weapon on school property, carried a weapon, and carried a gun.

According to the Trevor Project's 2022 National Study of TNGE and LGBTQ Youth of Color [93]:	
TNGE youth are **2 to 2.5 times more likely to experience depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts** in comparison to their cisgender LGBQ peers.	**59%** of Black TNGE youth **reported seriously considering suicide** with more than 1 in 4 (26%) attempting suicide in the past year.
In a survey of 34,000 U.S. LGBTQ youth, 12% of white youth, 21% of Native/Indigenous youth, 20% of Middle Eastern/Northern African youth, 19% of Black youth, 17% of multiracial youth, 16% of Latinx youth, and 12% of Asian/Pacific Islander youth have attempted suicide within the past year.	Across race/ethnicity, **Native/Indigenous youth who are Two-Spirit/LGBTQ** consistently report the highest suicide risk and are **the most underrepresented** in research and data about youth.

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TNGE Youth in Other Systems

Transgender, nonbinary and gender-expansive (TNGE) youth experience significant oppression in systems outside of education including housing, juvenile justice, and child welfare. Despite the fundamental need for protection against discrimination, only 27 states and the District of Columbia explicitly include sexual orientation and gender identity in nondiscrimination protections specific to the child welfare system; only 21 states and the District of Columbia do so in their juvenile justice systems; and only 12 states and the District of Columbia do so in their facilities serving runaway and homeless youth[5].

Homelessness

The Trevor Project, an organization that provides a number of life-saving and life-affirming services to young people who are in crisis, with a focus on LGBTQ young people age 24 or younger, released a 2021 report[92] on homeless LGBTQ and TNGE youth which found:

- Homelessness and housing instability were reported at higher rates among transgender and nonbinary youth than for their cisgender peers.

- Transgender youth who reported past housing instability or current homelessness had more than three times greater risk odds of ever being physically threatened or abused due to their gender identity.

- 14% of transgender and nonbinary respondents who had never experienced housing instability reported being threatened or abused due to their gender identity in the last year, compared to 34% of transgender and nonbinary youth who reported past housing instability and 39% of transgender and nonbinary youth who were currently homeless.

- TNGE youth in New York City have been found to be eight times as likely as non-transgender youth to trade sex for a place to stay.

- Studies show that nearly one in four (23%) transgender young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 experience homelessness.

Child Welfare

- As of 2017, only four states had statutory or regulatory guidance regarding placement of transgender youth in out-of-home care in accordance with their gender identities[5]
- Studies have found that about 30% of youth in foster care identify as LGBTQ+ and 5 percent as transgender[5, 91, 92]
- 57% of transgender youth reported experiencing family rejection (5)
- More specifically, there are 5.6% transgender youth in foster care compared to 2.25% in the general youth population[5]

Recommendations for Building an Affirming School

Data

1. Commit to conducting and analyzing the Youth Risk Behavior Survey or another state or local survey instrument that collects data by gender identity. Use the data to better understand issues TNGE youth face in your state and school district.

2. Along with the recommendations below, review and revise school policies and practices to reduce risks identified in the data.

Policies and Procedures

1. Conduct an equity review of school policies and procedures to assess explicit impact on and inclusion of TNGE youth. Revise policies and procedures as needed.

2. Make sure your school has an enumerated anti-bullying policy that explicitly includes TNGE youth.

3. Revise policies regarding bathroom and locker room use to support TNGE youth.

4. Revise policies to enable young people to use their choice of pronoun and name while in school and on school-related documents.

5. Assess and revise, if necessary, the dress code policy to support TNGE youth.

6. Assess Title IX protocols and procedures to make sure they include protections for TNGE youth.

7. Create a policy that empowers TNGE youth to participate on school sports teams that correlate with their gender identity.

8. Review and revise, if necessary, the policies related to student clubs to ensure the school has a GSA.

9. Review health services protocols/referrals and revise, if necessary, to assist TNGE youth to obtain any emotional or physical health care as needed.

Administrators, Educators, and Curriculum

1. Provide mandatory training for all building employees (educators, administrators, administrative staff and janitorial staff, etc.) on gender, gender identity, gender stereotypes and gender-based violence. Help these adults to examine their own biases and the potential impact of their bias on interactions with young people. (see **Advocates for Youth Virtual Professional Development**)

2. Assist all building staff to learn how to intervene effectively in microaggressions and other examples of bullying and oppression that negatively impact TNGE youth. (see **Advocates for Youth Racial Justice in Sex Ed Virtual Professional Development**)

3. Examine the school curriculum and revise to be LGBTQ inclusive, highlighting TNGE people and their contributions in history, language arts, visual arts and other subjects.

4. Examine the sex education curriculum used in the district. If necessary, revise the curriculum to be LGBTQ-inclusive or replace it with an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum (see **www.3Rs.org**).

5. Identify educators that want to support the GSA and other LGBTQ or TNGE related activities during and after school.

School Facilities

1. Establish/identify gender-neutral bathrooms for TNGE youth to use safely. Identify/repurpose single stall bathrooms for this purpose.

2. Identify protocol/establish a place for TNGE youth to safely change for physical education that doesn't further "other" them.

3. Employ hallway and classroom posters, murals, decorations, etc. that demonstrate the school's commitment to diversity. Include visuals that represent identities of those attending the school.

4. Advertise the existence of the GSA near the main office and in popular hallways and hangouts.

Model Policies & Procedures

School and district policies are being updated across the country to include specific protections for TNGE youth. Policy change is an excellent way to implement lasting, durable, systemic change. In the absence of a district or state policy, individual schools may consider implementing local guidelines for their school community. When developing these policies, consider the components below.

CHECKLIST: Does your school or district policy address:

- Nondiscrimination and Harassment
    - Clearly defining and outlining examples of discrimination and harassment
- Terminology
    - Common language related to gender and sexuality
- Names & Pronouns
    - Allowing students to declare their own name and pronoun, regardless of parent permission.
    - Administrative guidelines for ensuring a student's name and pronoun are respected and communicated
- Student Records, Privacy and Confidentiality
    - Proper custodianship of student records, including parent communication and disclosure of information
- School Facilities (Bathrooms & Locker Rooms)
    - Permitting students to use gender-segregated facilities consistent with their gender identity at school
- Overnight Field Trips
    - Permitting students to be assigned housing arrangements consistent with what helps TNGE students feel safe and supported
- Athletics and Physical Education
    - Permitting students to participate in physical education and school athletics consistent with their wishes
- Curriculum
    - Including positive representations of TNGE history and figures in all content areas
- Dress Code
    - Clarifying guidelines and expectations for school attire for all students, without special treatment for TNGE students

- Training & PD
  - Requiring ongoing professional development for teachers
- Media & Communication
  - Appointing a spokesperson or team on LGBTQ issues for all internal and external communications

Thankfully, there are numerous examples of existing policy language. Check out the sample policies below.

Sample Policies:
- **GLSEN Model Policy**
- **GLSEN/NCTE Model Policy**
- **NYCDOE Policy**
- **DC Policy**
- **New Hampshire Policy**
- **LA Policy**

Professional Development

Professional development (PD) is an excellent way to ensure educators have the most up-to-date knowledge about emerging fields in education. Most teachers will report that PD days are often hit-or-miss, but topics which challenge them, provide practical skills and suggestions for implementation, and improve the quality of learning for their students are best.

We cannot assume that all teachers understand the importance of learning about gender. It will be important to set the stage with the **why**. While we see PD about supporting and affirming TNGE students as important enough, it's also important to recognize that training about gender inclusion in the classroom creates safer places of learning and community for all students.

LGBTQ students who are able to identify at least one supportive educator have better grades, better attendance, greater school connectedness and better health outcomes.

Considerations for Professional Development:
- **Presenter**. Is the facilitator you've chosen someone who can speak directly to the needs and experiences of TNGE youth? What experience do they have? Do they belong to any of the communities they represent? How will their personal identities be welcomed by your staff?
- **Frequency and Length**. Furthering knowledge about the many aspects of gender-inclusive schools cannot happen during a 45-minute presentation. Be sure to give this topic the time it deserves. Additionally, school turnover is at an all-time high. Make PD a regular part of annual training for your staff. Insist on a series-based model, where learning happens throughout the year and provides opportunities for new educators each school year to catch up.

- **Audience Readiness.** Consider where your faculty and staff currently are in their understanding about gender, LGBTQ-inclusion, and the needs and experiences of TNGE youth. Most staff teams will need to start with the basics, and some teams will be more advanced. Ensure there are ways to meet your team where they are, while also honoring the expertise that may already be in the room.

- **Preparing for Opposition.** Some staff may be hostile to this training. It will be important to acknowledge their discomfort while also reaffirming their responsibility and expectations as an educator for all of their students.

Sample Professional Development Topics:
- LGBTQ 101
- The Needs and Experiences of TNGE Youth in School
- Supporting TNGE Youth who are Transitioning in School
- Building an LGBTQ-Inclusive Curriculum
- TNGE-Inclusive Policy Implementation
- Working with Families and Caregivers
- How to Start and Maintain a Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA)

Where to Find PD Offerings:
- **Advocates for Youth**
- **Welcoming Schools**
- **Gender Spectrum**
- **GLSEN / Local GLSEN Chapter**
- **Gender Inclusive Schools**

Student Clubs (GSAs)

Transgender, non-binary, and gender expansive (TNGE) youth experience lower rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide attempts when there is at least one adult who affirms their identity[30, 82, 93]. Student clubs such as Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) have been a safe haven for TNGE and LGBTQ students in schools for decades. GSAs have been proven to lead to an increase in self-esteem and sense of belonging at school for TNGE students who are often bullied and ostracized.

The federal Equal Access Act allows any student to start a non-curricular club in their school. With the help of a **faculty advisor**, students can feel supported in making their GSA thrive long after they leave school. For more **information about GSAs**, check the National GSA Network's wealth of resources and information about GSAs in your state and across the U.S.

Below is a Quick Start guide of general areas to consider as you work with students to tailor the GSA to their needs.

Quick Start Guide to Starting a GSA:

- **WHO:** GSAs are for students who identify as part of the LGBTQ community, students who are exploring their identities, and the allies who fiercely support them. There is no right or wrong way to start a GSA - only lessons learned and new, creative pathways to take.

- **WHERE:** Select a part of campus where students feel safe according to how they define safety. This could be a classroom, a room inside the library, or another part of the school. For schools with a more welcoming climate, see if your GSA can have a designated hallway or board to post information.

- **WHAT:** This depends on the needs of the students. Most GSAs are a safe space to build community, share resources, and provide support. Other GSAs lead events like **The Day of Silence, Transgender Day of Visibility, LGBTQ History Month**, and **Transgender Day of Remembrance**. After you start a GSA, use the National GSA Network's guide to **build your GSA!**

- **WHY:** There are many compelling reasons for students to have access to a GSA - check the History of the LGBTQ Inclusive Schools Movement at the beginning of this guide for more information. **Do not be discouraged by low attendance.** A TNGE student might not feel safe enough to come to the GSA, but just the presence of one in their school can lead to a sense of belonging in a time where they might be convinced they don't belong.[31,42]

- **HOW:** Once you have the time and the space, follow these **10 steps** to register your GSA and connect with others.

LGBTQ youth who report having at least one accepting adult were 40% less likely to report a suicide attempt in the past year[93].

LGBTQ-Inclusive Curriculum

What if the content students learned in school reflected their own identities, as well as the diversity of identities which exist in the world?

Emily Style (1988) explored "the need for curriculum to function both as **window and as mirror**, in order to reflect and reveal most accurately both a multicultural world and the student [themself]." Yet, according to the **2021 GLSEN National School Climate Survey**[38]:

- A majority of LGBTQ+ students reported that their classes did not include any LGBTQ+ topics in class

- Only 16.3% of LGBTQ+ students were taught positive representations about LGBTQ+ people, history, or events in their schools; and

- 14.4% had been taught negative content about LGBTQ+ topics

An inclusive curriculum leads to improved academic and health outcomes for youth.

According to GLSEN, **students who experienced an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum**[35]:

- Were less likely to feel unsafe due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression
- Were less likely to miss school
- Felt greater belonging to their school community
- Reported better psychological wellbeing, including higher levels of self-esteem, lower levels of depression, and a lower likelihood of having seriously considered suicide in the past year.

While many believe that LGBTQ topics belong in social studies or health classes only, an LGBTQ inclusive curriculum can be implemented in any content area.

Where to begin:
- Rather than replace your current curriculum, explore ways to add or alter the content
  - Include situations in word problems that include TNGE people, gender-diverse family structures, and data about TNGE people
- Intentionally seek out TNGE historical figures and events to mention
- Celebrate days and months of observance:
  - Trans Awareness Month (November)
  - LGBTQ History Month (October)
  - International Non-Binary People's Day (July 14)
- Check out these inclusive curriculum guides and sex education standards:
  - **GLSEN**
  - **National Sex Education Standards**
  - **APA**
- Check out **Advocates for Youth's LGBTQ-inclusive Rights, Respect, Responsibility Sex Education Curriculum for grades K-12**

Advocating for Gender Inclusivity in Schools

The Legal Landscape

Recently, new policies, procedures, and bills have been introduced to eliminate discussions of sexuality in schools. Many policies and bills have been introduced to directly target transgender, non-binary, and gender-expansive students and prevent them from accessing an affirming and inclusive learning environment. These anti-transgender initiatives harm TGNE students.

Transgender, Non-Binary and Gender-Expansive Student Bill of Rights
TNGE Youth have the right to:
Be who they are in school. This includes being open about their gender identity and transitioning while in school.   **Write and speak about their identity.** They can communicate about their identity to teachers, classmates, and in-school assignments if they so choose.   **Wear what they want to school.** Their clothes do not have to match their gender, whether a school requires that students wear uniforms or not. Clothing should still adhere to appropriate school dress guidelines for any gender (for example: bare midriffs, ripped or torn clothing, clothing that reveals private body areas, etc.)   **Participate in school activities and events consistent with their gender identity.** This includes prom court elections, concert attire, and other gendered activities.   **Use the bathroom and locker room consistent with their gender identity.** TNGE students should not be forced or asked to use separate facilities.

Resources:

- **Legal Guidance on Transgender Students' Rights**
  National Education Association

- **Title IX Protects Students from Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**
  U.S. Department of Education

- **KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: A Guide for Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students**
  GLSEN & ACLU

Most districts have a Title IX Coordinator to which complaints and investigation requests are sent. These coordinators are usually housed within legal and compliance departments at your local school district. If you prefer, you can file a complaint directly with the Office of Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education **HERE**.

Preparing for and Responding to Disinformation Campaigns

Before Your Program is Attacked

First and foremost, build up support within your school district for TNGE students. You need the school administration to stand firm if the work you do to support TNGE youth is targeted.

Second, *nurture relationships with community partners and constituents* within your school district and state. Educate them about the work the school is doing to support TNGE youth and why it is so important. Collect contact information so you can mobilize these support organizations if and when you need them. Include parents, young people, community-based organizations and agencies, clergy, and others to build a coalition of support for TNGE youth in your district..

Write and vet simple talking points about your program. In short simple sentences, be prepared to share the research and values behind school policies and programs that support and affirm TNGE youth. Have a few emotional stories to share that demonstrate why this work is important to the students. Stay abreast of attacks on other school districts that support and affirm TNGE youth. What disinformation are their opponents using against them? Have talking points ready to correct these mistruths in case your school district comes under attack.

Identify a handful of respected messengers within your coalition or community such as school administrators, adolescent healthcare providers, faith leaders, influential parents and young people, and ask them to support the school's TNGE programming. Educate them about what the school does to support TNGE youth and why it's important. Provide them with your talking points and offer them media and public speaking training. Seek opportunities for them to speak to the media about the importance of your efforts. Provide these messengers with training on digital and physical security.
Continually demonstrate the importance of the district's supportive and affirming policies on TNGE students.

If You Get Attacked

Assess the damage before acting. Is it just an article on a far right obscure website that few will read unless you call attention to it? Has the school's program become the far right's new punching bag? Is the opposition organizing people to show up at school board meetings to protest in person? Are you or your staff being doxed or cyberbullied? If any of the latter, or if the attack threatens to derail your program or put you or your staff in danger, a coordinated response is necessary.

To mount a coordinated response, bring in a communications crisis professional to help if possible. Use your respected messengers as spokespeople. Help them to respond in the media, provide testimony at a school board meeting or session of your legislature. Correct any misinformation and disinformation vehemently and without apology. Use your talking points to explain what your program is and use values language to share why it is so important.

Always remember, your audience is not your opposition, you will not convince them. You are working to build understanding and support from the "moveable middle"– particularly parents and school administrators who are unsure whether the extremists' lies are true, those who are confused by the fear and shame so often used as weapons by the opposition to gain power and restrict the rights of those we care about.

Finally, remember, while responding to these attacks can be scary, it is also an opportunity to build power and promote understanding and support for the work you do.

Responding to Opposition and Hostility

A recent, sharp increase in anti-trans legislation presents challenges to creating affirming and inclusive schools for TNGE youth. Battles between parents, schools, and administrations can distract us from our focus - protecting TNGE youth. Below is a sample of common anti-trans rhetoric, the research-based and medically accurate information to date, and a brief talking point to use as a guide when responding to disinformation.

What they're saying	What we know	Talking Point
Children are too young to learn about gender or make decisions about their gender. Allowing children to make decisions about their gender is harmful.	Children have a natural awareness of gender at very early ages. During infancy, children begin to receive messages about gender from various places, and their understanding of gender is often shaped by how they interact with their parents. Children begin to understand gender by age 3 or 4, during which time many begin to settle on their own gender identity. When children communicate about their gender, we should follow their lead. We should believe them and surround them with support, comfort and reassurance. Research shows that the actual harm takes place when we reject and deny gender expansiveness in youth, not when we allow them to be who they are.	Children begin to understand gender around age 3, mostly through interacting with their parents. Research shows kids are healthiest when we support their ability to communicate about gender and allow them to be who they are.
Puberty blockers are harmful medicines.	Pubertal suppression is an area of medicine that predates its current close proximity to the conversation about transgender youth. "Puberty blockers" were approved by the FDA in 1993 to treat "precocious puberty", or, puberty that has started earlier than expected. In youth who are prescribed pubertal suppression medicines for precocious puberty, the drug has been shown as safe. While puberty blockers are not currently FDA-approved to be prescribed to TNGE youth, a 2020 study showed that TNGE youth who have access to these medications have been significantly less likely to experience suicidality. Puberty blockers are lifesaving medicines and create an immense sense of comfort for adolescents who are exploring their gender identity.	Pediatricians have been using these safe medicines for years to treat children who may be harmed by the onset of puberty for a variety of medical reasons. Puberty blockers save lives by significantly reducing suicide in children who are transgender, and provide immense comfort for TNGE adolescents and their families.
What they're saying	What we know	Talking Point

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Gender ideology promotes pedophilia	The idea that we have control and determination over our own bodies, which must also extend to our gender and identity, is a concept that is inconsistent with the characterization of sexual assault. Equipping children with more accurate information about their own bodies and bodily autonomy, and helping them understand that decisions about their bodies are valid and respected, is an excellent way to teach about consent, healthy relationships, boundaries, and safeguarding against abuse.	Learning age-appropriate concepts like bodily autonomy and consent helps kids create healthy friendships and makes them more likely to report if an adult makes them uncomfortable.
The goal of making schools LGBTQ inclusive is to make cisgender, heterosexual male identity into the villain	The goal of making schools LGBTQ inclusive is to teach children that no one deserves to be mistreated, discriminated against and erased simply for who they are.	The goal of making schools LGBTQ inclusive is to teach children that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.
Learning about LGBTQ themes in school will confuse children and entice them into changing their gender or sexuality	Learning about LGBTQ themes in school helps children to build an appreciation for diversity, to become more aware of themselves and others, to build empathy and social awareness. What is potentially more confusing is refusing to teach about an entire population and culture that: (1) exists, and (2) has contributed significantly to our human experience. Children are potentially confused when expected to "perform" as a gender different from their personally understood identity. Additionally, transgender children are not confused. A 2017 study showed that "young transgender children were just as likely as "gender-typical" children to (a) show preferences for peers, toys, and clothing culturally associated with their expressed gender, (b) dress in a stereotypically gendered outfit, (c) endorse flexibility in gender stereotypes, and (d) say they are more similar to children of their gender than to children of another gender." Teaching about gender identity and sexuality in school makes school a safer place for everyone.	Every school has LGBTQ students — kids do not become confused about their own identity because someone else's is also respected.

What they're saying	What we know	Talking Point
Conversations about gender have no place in school	School is an excellent place to explore gender roles, gender expectations, and gender norms, and how they shape our perception. Gender has played a major role in the development of societies and governments, the economy, social science, and the arts. If gender was truly irrelevant, why are there so many efforts to stop its teaching?	Talking honestly about gender identity in school makes school a safer place for everyone. Even kids who identify as straight are less likely to be bullied and harassed in a learning environment that treats everyone with respect.
Trans people usually regret transitioning	According to a 2011 study, 94% of trans people reported an improvement in their quality of life due to transitioning, and 96% reported that their sense of wellbeing improved. In another study of transgender youth who were using puberty blockers as gender-affirming care, only 1.9% decided to stop the treatment after starting. Detransition is rare, and is often used as a scare tactic to deter from the reality that gender-affirming care improves the quality of life for trangender youth and adults.	There is a lot of bad information out there — let's set the record straight. 94% of trans people report their quality of life improves after they're able to live as the gender they are.
Trans identity is a mental illness	According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, "transgender identities and diverse gender expressions do not constitute a mental disorder; variations in gender identity and expression are normal aspects of human diversity, and binary definitions of gender do not always reflect emerging gender identities; gender identity evolves as an interplay of biology, development, socialization, and culture; and if a mental health issue exists, it most often stems from stigma and negative experiences rather than being intrinsic to the child."	There is a lot of bad information out there — let's set the record straight. The American Academy of Pediatrics says that transgender identities and expressions are normal aspects of human diversity.
What they're saying	What we know	Talking Point
Parents should be the sole decision-makers about their children	Many parents do an excellent job of making decisions that affect their children's lives and future. However, few parents will admit to knowing everything there is to know about how to keep their child healthy and safe. There is a wealth	Parents have everything they need to begin the journey of supporting their TNGE children. When making decisions for their children, many parents search for information and resources to

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	of knowledge that supports best practices for TNGE youth, particularly in medicine and education. TNGE youth themselves are urging us to act in their best interests with regard to their needs and experiences. We believe parents have everything they need to begin the journey of supporting their TNGE children, and encourage parents who are interested in seeking out additional help to do so.	support their efforts, but some of what is readily available is misinformation and falsehoods. Parents who are interested in seeking out additional help to support their TNGE children are encouraged to do so.

Engaging Families & Caregivers of TNGE Students

The work of creating safer, more affirming schools for TNGE young people is greatly enhanced by the engagement and dedication of families and caregivers. TNGE youth thrive at home and in school when their families exhibit accepting behaviors.

High levels of family non-acceptance are associated with higher levels of negative health outcomes including depression, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, substance abuse, and HIV/STD risk. Research shows that small increases in accepting behaviors contribute to better health outcomes for TNGE youth[23, 24].

LGBTQ young people who experienced rejecting behaviors from their parents were:

- More than 8 times as likely to have attempted suicide
- Nearly 6 times as likely to report high levels of depression
- More than 3 times as likely to use illegal drugs
- More than 3 times as likely to be at high risk for HIV and sexually transmitted diseases

Some families and caregivers may be knowledgeable and supportive of TNGE youth and are able to show and speak up for TNGE young people. Other families and caregivers may have fear and anxiety that prevents them from accessing the necessary steps to educate themselves about TNGE language, information, and resources. How can you assess what steps to take when engaging families and caregivers?

Where to begin?

- Start by asking your TNGE student about their support network and what support looks like outside of school.
- Before engaging families and caregivers, make sure you have enthusiastic consent from the TNGE young person, especially around name and pronoun usage with family and caregivers.
- Assume that families love their children and want the best for them.
- Consider reasons why families may exhibit rejecting behaviors, which are often related to desires for their children to "fit in", be liked or remain safe.

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- Meet families where they are. Start with their level of knowledge and beliefs about their child's identity. Believe that growth is possible.
- Understand that families often have limited knowledge about gender and sexuality, which may lead to feelings of fear, embarrassment, and skepticism.
- Understand that many of us have complex relationships to identity and have received mixed messaging about gender and sexuality, often related to cultural or religious values.

Strategies to engage families and caregivers:
- Acknowledge and address feelings of unfamiliarity.
- Emphasize shared values, hopes, and dreams.
- Educate families about gender diversity as well as the positive health benefits which come from supportive behaviors.
- Share stories of other families on this journey and encourage families to share their own.

Thank You!

The timeline of the LGBTQ Inclusive Schools Movement illustrates that transgender, non-binary, and gender-expansive (TNGE) youth have been fighting for affirming and inclusive schools for decades. There have been many victories and periods of celebration throughout the movement, as well as devastating setbacks and urgent calls for action. Currently, young people are bracing for negative impact as adults continue to battle each other. Lost in the crossfire are the TNGE young people who deserve better.

We hope this Resource Guide has armed you with the necessary tools and information to understand what TNGE youth are facing in your school, the importance of your role in protecting them, and some steps you can take to advocate for change.

Our hope for the future is to eliminate the need for this guide because every part of the school is already safe not just for TNGE students, but for all students.

Thank you for joining us in the fight for safer, affirming, and inclusive schools!

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Glossary of Terms

Terminology and language to describe gender and sexuality experiences and identities are always evolving, and identity terms mean different things to different people. This glossary serves as a starting point for understanding important terminology.

assigned sex
A medical label (female, male or intersex) assigned to an infant at or before birth, based on the infant's reproductive traits, which includes consideration of internal and/or external genitalia, chromosomes and hormones.

cisgender
A word to describe a person whose gender identity is congruent with (or "matches") the sex they were assigned at birth. (i.e., a person who is not transgender).

coming out
The process by which one accepts and/or comes to identify one's own sexual orientation or gender identity (to "come out" to oneself). Also the process by which one shares one's sexual orientation or gender identity with others (to "come out" to friends, etc.)

disinformation
False information deliberately spread to deceive. Disinformation is sometimes confused with misinformation, which is false information but is not deliberate.

gender
Socially constructed ideas about the characteristics, norms and behaviors related to being a woman, girl, man, boy, or a person who does not identify within the gender binary.

gender binary
The idea that gender is strictly an either/or option of male/man/masculine or female/woman/feminine based on sex assigned at birth, rather than a continuum or spectrum of gender identities and expressions.

gender dysphoria
The formal diagnosis in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition (DSM 5), used by psychologists and physicians to indicate that a person meets the diagnostic criteria to engage in medical transition. In other words, the medical diagnosis for accessing transgender care if needed. This diagnosis does not apply to all transgender people and should not be used generally to refer to being of transgender experience. Outside of the clinical definition, gender dysphoria can also refer to the uncomfortable feeling of disconnect between one's body and one's gender identity.

gender euphoria
Describes feelings of comfort, alignment, and bliss when one's gender expression (appearance, clothing, style, etc.) mirrors their internal perception of their gender.

gender expansive
An umbrella term to describe someone whose gender identity and/or expression challenges traditional ideas and norms.

gender expression
A person's outward gender presentation, or how one communicates their gender identity to others, often through personal style, clothing, hairstyle, makeup, jewelry, voice and body language. People may use words like "masculine," "feminine," "androgynous," or "nonconforming" to describe their gender expression. Gender expression may or may not be congruent with a person's gender identity. At times, someone's gender expression may not match their gender identity if, for instance, a person does not feel safe or supported, or does not have the resources needed to engage in gender expression that authentically reflects their gender identity.

genderfluid
Describes a person whose gender identity is not fixed. A person who is gender fluid may always feel like a mix of the two traditional genders, many genders, or may feel more one gender some days, and another gender other days.

genderqueer
A person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. Other terms for people whose gender identity falls outside the gender binary include gender variant, gender expansive, etc.

gender identity
One's inner knowledge and understanding of their own gender. Gender identity is something that is self-determined. Gender identity may or may not align with one's assigned sex at birth or one's gender expression. Knowledge about one's gender identity does not provide information about someone's sexual orientation.

intersex
A medical assignment at birth that refers to any variation in the combination of primary and secondary sex characteristics, such as external genitalia, internal reproductive organs, hormones, chromosomes, and other components of biology.

non-binary (or nonbinary)
A gender identity which exists outside of, transcends, combines or rejects the gender binary. An umbrella term to describe any gender identity or expression which exists outside of the man/woman gender binary. Nonbinary people may or may not also identity as transgender.

transition
A process by which a transgender, nonbinary or gender-expansive person takes actions to become closer in alignment with their gender identity. Transition is unique to each person and may involve a series of medical, legal and/or social options.

queer
An umbrella term used by some to describe people who think of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression as outside of societal norms. Some people view the term queer as more fluid and

inclusive than traditional categories for sexual orientation and gender identity. Due to its history as a derogatory term, the term queer is not embraced or used by all members of the LGBTQ community.

questioning
A person who is exploring or questioning their sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression. Some may later identify as transgender or gender non-conforming, while others may not. Can also refer to someone who is questioning or exploring their sexual orientation.

racial justice
The systematic fair treatment of people of all races, resulting in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all. Racial justice goes beyond "anti-racism." It is not just the absence of discrimination and inequities, but also the presence of deliberate systems and supports to achieve and sustain racial equity through proactive and preventative measures.

racism
Historically rooted system of power hierarchies based on race — infused in our institutions, policies and culture — that benefits white people and hurts Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color (BIPOC). Racism isn't limited to individual acts of prejudice, either deliberate or accidental. Rather, the most damaging racism is built into systems and institutions that shape our lives. Most coverage of race and racism is not "systemically aware," meaning that it either focuses on racism at the level of an individuals' speech or actions, dismisses systemic racism, or refers to racism in the past tense.

sexual orientation
How someone describes their feelings of attraction (emotional, psychological, physical, and/or sexual) towards others, especially regarding attraction to one or more genders.

transgender
An adjective used to describe a person whose gender identity is incongruent with (or does not "match") the sex they were assigned at birth. "Transgender" serves as an umbrella term to refer to the full range and diversity of identities within transgender communities. It is currently the most widely used and recognized term to refer to people of transgender experience.

white supremacy
A form of racism centered upon the belief that white people are superior to people of other racial backgrounds and that white people should politically, economically, and socially dominate non-white people. While often associated with violence perpetrated by the KKK and other white supremacist groups, it also describes a political ideology and systemic oppression that perpetuates and maintains the social, political, historical and/or industrial white domination.

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