CALL TO ACTION

from the

Virginia Grassroots Coalition Education Working Group

The Education Working Group of the Virginia Grassroots Coalition strongly opposes the replacement of the Virginia Department of Education's model policies for the treatment of transgender students in Virginia's public schools. The original model policies were developed in 2021 in response to Code of Virginia Section 22.1-23.3 as passed by the Virginia General Assembly in early 2021. This section of the code was intended to protect the mental and physial health of transgender and gender non-conforming youth, and requires that model policies be developed in accordance with evidence-based best practices. The original model policies were so developed, working with a team of experts, parent and student representatives, and school representatives and relied on peer-reviewed literature, conducted by recognized experts in education and youth mental health. The replacement of those evidence-based model policies with a document that is designed to inflame culture wars does not serve Virginia students or families.

We fully support parental engagement in schools and in their children's education. In fact, peer-reviewed research shows parental support is one of the most important factors protecting the mental health of transgender and gender non-conforming youth. However, school safety and belonging, including the ability to use chosen name and pronouns, and to use restrooms and locker rooms that match the student's gender identity, are also key factors in protecting students. In cases where family members are abusive and threaten the safety of their children, schools have a responsibility to protect students. In no case should taunting or shaming of students be perpetrated by school staff, as the proposed policy would allow.

Several practices recommended in the 2022 proposed model policies are contrary to evidence-based best practices, and therefore are in direct violation of such guidance. In fact, several of these draft policies have been shown to result in increased assaults in school, increased suicidal ideation or suicide attempts by students, and increased probability of incarceration of students. Compromising the safety and lives of Virginia students is an appalling move. We hope families across the Commonwealth can come together to speak out against these model policies and work to reduce fear and tensions rather than inflame them. The public comment period is open between September 26 and October 26, 2022. Concerned citizens are encouraged to voice their opinion on this proposed change to the 2021 model policy and can do so at this link.