



# Gender-Inclusive Guidelines for Supporting Students



The Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) is committed to providing an educational and work environment that is free from discrimination, fosters equitable opportunities, and values diversity and commonality. As stated in Policy 1010 Anti-Discrimination, HCPSS prohibits any behaviors that interfere with providing a safe and supportive environment for all students, including discrimination based on race, national origin, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, religion, disability, or any other protected status in accordance with applicable law. Policy 1080 Educational Equity adds, “the Board is committed to providing all students with a dynamic and educational program that nurtures their cognitive, social and emotional well-being and affirms their identity and experience, in order to maximize each student’s individual potential.”

All HCPSS students should feel comfortable expressing their gender identity. The needs of each student will be supported on an individual basis. In all cases, the goal is to ensure the safety, comfort, affirmation, and healthy development of the student while supporting their social integration and ending the stigmatization and violations of dignity. HCPSS strives to maintain the privacy of all students and families and to further the successful educational development and well-being of all students. As with all aspects of a student’s school experience, HCPSS believes that students do best when supported by family and community. However, parent consent is preferred but not required for schools to affirm student name and pronoun requests. HCPSS recognizes that supporting and affirming gender identity can be difficult to navigate for students and families. Staff in the HCPSS Department of Program Innovation and Student Well-being are available to discuss and consult regarding student supports.

These guidelines are intended to inform HCPSS students, staff, parents, and stakeholders of important HCPSS practices and procedures related to affirming students in the school system. This guidance applies to schools, school property, school-sponsored functions and activities, school buses or vehicles, and bus stops. HCPSS schools support a student’s assertion of their gender identity.

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## COMMITMENT TO PRIVACY

Students have a right to privacy, which includes the right to keep one’s gender identity private at school, if desired. Information about a student’s gender identity, legal name, or gender assigned at birth also may be confidential information. Disclosing this information to other students, staff, parents, caregivers or other third parties may violate privacy laws, such as the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). HCPSS shall ensure that all information relating to a student’s gender identity is kept confidential in accordance with Policies 3050 Records Management and 9050 Student Records and with applicable state and federal privacy laws. School staff shall not disclose information that may reveal a student’s gender identity to other students, staff, parents, families or other third parties, unless required to provide an essential service or function, or unless the student has authorized such disclosure.

Students have the right to discuss and share their gender identity and expression openly and to decide when, with whom, and how much to disclose their information. If a student chooses to share their gender identity with staff or other students, this does not give the recipient of this information the right to share this information with anyone else. The student should guide and inform staff of the name and pronouns to use and in which contexts.

In alignment with Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) guidance, the school should make every effort to protect the student’s previous identity whether a legal name change has occurred or not.

## DEFINITIONS

The definitions below are not intended to label students but rather to assist in understanding gender inclusive language. Students may or may not use these terms to describe themselves.

**Agender** is used to describe a person who does not identify as any gender.

**Cisgender** is used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with the cultural and social expectations of the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Gender** is a label and social and legal status that refers to the socially constructed expectations, attitudes, and feelings related to roles, behaviors, expressions and identities that a society or culture associates with a person's sex. It influences how people perceive themselves and each other, how they act and interact, and the distribution of power and resources in society. Behavior that is compatible with cultural expectations is referred to as gender-normative, while behaviors that are viewed as incompatible with these expectations constitute gender nonconformity.

**Gender Expression** is the external appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, body characteristics, or voice, all of which may or may not conform or align with socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.

**Gender Fluid** describes a person whose gender identity is not fixed and shifts in the long or short term. A gender fluid individual could identify with multiple genders at once, shift to none, or move between single gender identities. For some this may occur several times a day, for others this could be less often.

**Gender Identity** is a person's inherent sense of self or psychological knowledge as it relates to belonging to one or more genders that may or may not correspond to a person's sex assigned at birth. Since gender identity is internal, a person's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others. There is considerable diversity in how individuals and groups understand, experience, and express gender through the roles they take on, the expectations placed on them, relations with others and the complex ways that gender is institutionalized in society. The age at which individuals come to understand and express their gender identity may vary based on their social, family, and environmental factors. As a result, the individual best situated to determine a person's gender identity is that person.

**Gender Nonconforming** individuals are those whose gender-related identity does not meet the societal and social expectations associated with their sex assigned at birth. Gender nonconforming people can differ in the ways in which they express as male, female, some combination of both, or neither.

**Genderqueer and Nonbinary** refer to persons whose gender identity and/or expression falls outside of societal expectations of the gender binary of male and female (i.e., identifies with neither or both genders).

**Intersex** refers to a range of physical sex characteristics that do not fit the typical definition of male or female. Intersex is an umbrella term for differences in sex traits or anatomy. There are many possible variations in genitalia, hormones, internal anatomy or chromosomes.

**Presenting Name** is a name selected by the student, that is different than their legal name assigned at birth. The presenting name will mask the legal name on most school system documents from the time of the change forward.

**Sex** is a label typically assigned by a doctor at birth, and memorialized on a birth certificate. Sex refers to a set of perceived and actual biological attributes that are primarily associated with physical and physiological features such as chromosomes, gene expression, hormone levels and functionality, and external and internal reproductive/sexual anatomy.

**Sexual Orientation** is a person's identity in relation to whom they are attracted to. All people have a sexual orientation. Sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are distinct components of a person's identity. Sexual orientation should not be confused with a person's gender identity or gender expression.

**Transgender** is an umbrella term that describes when a person's sex assigned at birth does not match their identity. A transgender boy, for example, is a boy who was assigned the sex of female at birth but has a clear and persistent identity as male. The term transgender can also include persons who do not feel they fit into a dichotomous sex structure through which they are identified as male or female. Individuals in this category may feel as if they are in the wrong gender, but this perception may or may not correlate with a desire for surgical or hormonal reassignment.

## NAMES AND PRONOUNS

A student has the right to be addressed by a name and pronoun that corresponds to their gender identity. Please note, as also indicated in the masking procedures discussed below, parent consent is not required; however, it is our goal to be as inclusive of parents and families as possible. Teachers should add a question regarding pronouns to their “getting to know you” surveys at the start of the course, in addition to questions about students’ interests. An official name or gender change is not required for staff to use the name and/or pronouns, and staff should honor what the student requests. According to [Policy 1010 Anti-Discrimination](#), “Employees, students, and third parties may be subject to disciplinary action or consequences for discriminatory behavior even when the behavior does not rise to the level of discrimination as defined by prevailing federal and state laws.” If a student informs a staff member of a change to their name and/or gender identity, the staff member should ask the student how they wish to be addressed (i.e., name and pronouns) and encourage the student to meet with the school counselor. Adding pronouns or using a different name can be supported in more depth by school counselors who have additional training in this area. Consultation with other staff can also strengthen the support for students, although privacy concerns must be considered.



Asking a person’s pronouns makes spaces more inclusive. While “preferred pronoun” is sometimes used, “What are your pronouns?” is a more appropriate phrase. Identity is not a preference. Staff should make best attempts to use the pronouns given by the person. Including pronouns is a step toward respecting gender identity and creating a more welcoming space for all. Those who identify as gender nonconforming, gender expansive or nonbinary may use pronouns such as they/them, he/they, she/they, ze/zir, etc., as well as all or none.

## OFFICIAL RECORDS

According to MSDE, official school records are Student Records Cards (1-7), transcripts, and diplomas. HCPSS is not required to use a student’s legal name or gender on non-official school records and MSDE does allow local school systems to determine if a presenting name is used on a diploma. HCPSS will use the name and gender

requested by the student on non-official records or documents and diplomas. Based on guidance from MSDE issued in April 2022, “The Maryland Student Records System Manual (MSRSM) requires local school systems to maintain data on a student’s legal name that includes last name, first name, middle name, and generational suffix as it appears on the evidence of birth. Any change to a student’s legal name in the student record must be supported by evidence of birth.” Documents such as a driver’s license, and government issued ID card, are some examples of documents that can be used as evidence of birth. HCPSS will make attempts to retroactively change relevant student records to reflect the legal name change of the student.

The MSRSM states “self-identification of a student’s gender is sufficient for local school system reporting of student record information to the MSDE.” The MSRSM allows students to self-identify as 1 – male, 2 – female, or x – non-binary (student identifies as neither male or female or both). Information on paper copy files, such as the student’s name of cumulative and health room files, will be amended if a change in gender is requested, as will records in the student information system. Most retroactive documents (old report cards, health documents, etc.) will not be amended. Students should meet with a school counselor to initiate the change process and discuss possible implications or outcomes.

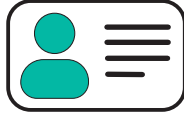
In situations where school staff or administrators are required to use or to report a student’s legal name, such as for purposes of standardized testing, staff should be thoughtful to avoid the inadvertent disclosure of confidential information. In order to support support students’ transitions outside of our school system (e.g., transition to adult services), some documents may use legal names and masked names. These will be discussed with the student and family before documents are finalized.



For students who have a masked name (see section below), they may request to have their masked name printed on their diploma. Students and families should be notified that the transcript must have the legal name and having a different name on the diploma may pose a challenge due to the discrepant identification documents for post-graduation education or job applications. If a student legally changes their name after graduation, the student may request a reissuance of the transcript or diploma. A nominal fee may be required for the reissuance.

## NAME MASKING

HCPSS students can request to mask a legal name assigned at birth. This is different than a student legally changing their name or using a preferred name, but will allow a presenting name to show on class rosters, report cards, IEPs, 504 plans, athletic rosters, student information system (Synergy), learning management system (Canvas), Naviance, yearbooks, any applications tied to active directory (e.g., Google Applications), and Food Service information. These documents are not considered to be Official School Records (per MSRSM). In the masking process, the legal name is held within the Student Information System, but will be hidden to most users (with the exception of nurses and staff making the changes). Legal name will continue to be used only on documents required to show legal name (e.g., State Reporting, Assessments, CTE Reports to MSDE, transcripts and Health reports), in addition to College Board records (or correspondence) and possibly those with other institutions of continuing education. If the student is going to another school or level, the student's current administration and/or school counselor should work with the student and/or family to develop a plan to inform the new school.



The parents/guardians should be informed of the masking change because the new name and/or gender will show on documents parents/guardians and other students will see (e.g., report cards, Synergy, Canvas, and information systems that use active directory). The change can be made by student request, but the student and staff should consider how the parent/guardian will be notified. However, parent consent is not required for schools to affirm student name and pronoun requests. If you have any questions about name masking please contact the Department of Program Innovation and Student Well-being.

### Masking Process:

1. Student (and preferably parent/guardian) meet with a school counselor or administrator. Request is made for first and/or middle name to be masked.
2. Staff (counselor and/or administrator) will notify the school principal of the request and fill out the Notice of Name Change form to be placed in the student's cumulative and health file. Staff should also change the name on the outside of the file, including the Special Education file.
3. The principal will send an email with the Student ID number and the request for the changed information (first name, middle name and/or gender) to the Coordinator of School Counseling.
4. The change will be implemented quickly. If the student's presenting name has a different letter than

their birth name, the student will receive a new active directory login within 24 hours of the change being made in Synergy.

- a. If the first initial of the name changes, the school counselor should guide the student to the media specialist for user name and password updates.

**Note:** *This is a different process and field than 'preferred name' in the Student Information System. That field can be used for any student any time and can be changed at the school, but does not change the name on class rosters or report cards (e.g., Robert prefers to be called Bobby).*

## TRANSITIONS

Many, although not all, transgender people undergo a gender transition. "Gender transition" describes the "process – social, legal, and/or medical – one goes through to affirm one's gender identity" (PFLAG). For most youth, and for all young children, the experience of gender transition rarely involves medical intervention.



Rather, most transgender youth will undergo gender transition through a process commonly referred to as social transition, whereby they begin to live and identify as the gender consistent with their gender-related identity.

Some transgender people who are close to reaching puberty, or after commencing puberty, may complement social transition with medical intervention that may include hormone suppressants, hormone therapy, and, for some, a range of gender-affirming surgeries.

The decision about whether and how to undergo gender transition is personal and depends on the unique circumstances of each individual. There is no medical or mental health diagnosis or treatment requirement that a student must meet in order to have their gender identity recognized and respected by HCPSS.

Students may come to discuss their transition with a staff member. In this case, staff should listen first and help connect the student with a school counselor to discuss possible supports. To ensure the safety and well-being of the student, counselors and staff will work with the student, and family when appropriate, throughout the process of transition. School counselors and staff should be available to answer questions, problem solve, and anticipate potential challenges. For example, if the student is not yet interested in masking their name but wants to go by another name at school, consider how to inform and include teachers, with particular consideration of how to support substitute teachers. This document shares some other recommendations to consider:

[Student Names Guidance.](#)

Often the parent or guardian of younger students may inform the school of a transition. In this circumstance, appropriate steps to support the student will be developed with the family. Sometimes, especially for older middle or high school students, the student may inform school staff directly regarding their desire to transition. Parents/guardians may already be aware and supportive of the student's gender identity, expression or transition status and can be partners in the transition process.

In some cases, however, notifying parents/guardians carries risks for the student, such as being rejected by the family. If this is the case, considering the student's age and the concerns presented, the school and student should consult with the Department of Program Innovation and Student Well-being. Staff will collaborate to determine how the school can support the student if they feel unsupported at home (Orr & Baum, 2015)(MSDE 2015). Staff members working with the student should develop a plan to support the student and work towards inclusion of the family, while considering the safety concerns. By finding solutions that facilitate inclusion of the family, the school creates a supportive environment where all students can feel safe and find academic success.

"If school officials have information about the student that is affecting the student at school and is important, they should tell the parents unless there is reason to believe that involving the parents would likely subject the student to physical and emotional harm." (Orman & Walsh, 2017) In accordance with [Policy 9050 Student Records](#), "when there is a risk to a student or others, information shared in confidence by students to HCPSS Board members or school system officials will be disclosed to principals; to those persons who, by their training or licensure, are able to provide immediate appropriate assistance; or to parents, except as outlined in Policy 1030 Child Abuse and Neglect."

### **GENDER-SEGREGATED ACTIVITIES**

Schools should work toward elimination of segregating students by gender (e.g., recess, grouping strategy, physical education, Mother's/Father's Day). As schools plan activities, know that not all of our students, staff, and families identify as male or female, nor do all of our families consist of a two-parent, cisgender, heterosexual household. HCPSS's mission is to create an inclusive and nurturing environment for all. All students should feel welcomed to participate in such activities by expanding the language we use to include other family members and caring adults (e.g., Welcome families of our Eagles! or Good morning scholars and your families!), including at family-centered activities or schoolwide events. Ensure activities and language focus on the importance of those who nurture, support, and love our students rather than

on limiting language to a particular role. In this way, all students, staff, and families can feel included and celebrate together.

### **RESTROOM ACCESSIBILITY**

Each student will have access to a restroom in accordance with the student's gender identity, considering the options in the school. Depending on where the student is in their social transition, the restroom option might need to be revisited throughout the year. Students should be given options and choice, including use of the restroom for the gender with which they identify and/or a safe and



adequate alternative, such as a single all gender or gender-inclusive restroom. Main office restrooms and health rooms can be one option among several, but should not be the only option for a student. Administrators can work with students, staff, and facilities to designate a restroom as all gender or gender-inclusive.

### **LOCKER ROOM ACCESSIBILITY**

Each student should have access to a locker room in accordance with the student's gender identity. All students' needs for privacy and modesty are important and accommodations can be offered to all students, as needed. These accommodations will be based on available facilities and will vary by school. If such a facility cannot be reasonably provided, such as where there is no private space in a locker room, students may be offered another room. However, any alternative arrangement should be provided in a way that protects the student's privacy and ensures an equal opportunity to participate in school programs and activities.

### **PERFORMING ARTS AND COMMUNITY EVENTS**

Music and performing groups should work toward elimination of the practice of segregating students by gender. In situations where students may be segregated by gender for rehearsal and performance purposes, teachers should refer to sections or voice types/qualities instead (e.g., musicians or singers). Staff should avoid using gendered language and should use distinctions for voiced choirs set by HCPSS: chorus, concert chorus, vocal ensemble, or chamber choir. For example, if a school has voiced choirs, bass clef singers can be assigned to concert chorus and treble clef singers can be assigned to the vocal ensemble. Encourage mixing the choirs standing/seated formation during performances. Additionally, dance and theater productions should work to expand beyond traditional gender role assignments.

Concert attire should not be assigned by gender or section. Inclusive options might include polo shirts or providing students with choices like dresses or tuxedos. Additionally, in community events such as Back to School Night or

commencement celebrations, welcome the audience as 'honored guests' instead of 'ladies and gentlemen.'

## INTERSCHOLASTIC ATHLETICS

As outlined by the Maryland Public Secondary School Athletic Association (MPSSAA):

1. Transgender students can participate on the interscholastic athletics team of the student's birth gender.
2. Transgender students can participate on interscholastic athletics teams of the gender that the student has transitioned to. This may be supported by medical documentation (hormonal therapy, sexual reassignment surgery, counseling, etc.) confirming transition of gender.
3. Transgender students may compete on the interscholastic team of the gender the student identifies with, as recognized by the local school system and established in official school system records. This may differ from the student's gender listed in school system records.



At HCPSS events, when welcoming guests, use inclusive language such as 'honored guests,' or 'families and friends of our Hammond Golden Bears,' instead of 'ladies and gentlemen.'

## DRESS CODES

Students have the right to dress in the manner they choose. Gender expression does not always correlate with our anatomy or our gender identity. All students may express themselves in the clothing of their choice as long as it complies with the HCPSS [Policy 9210 Dress Code](#).

## OVERNIGHT FIELD TRIPS

Students must be given opportunity and access to facilities according to their gender identity.

1. Make arrangements in consultation with the student.
2. A student's gender identity is confidential information and school staff members may not disclose a student's status to other students or their parents/guardians, as it relates to a field trip, without the consent of the student and/or the student's parent/guardian.
3. If accommodations involving all students can't be achieved, the student may be given the option of having a single room. However, it may increase the cost for the student and should be discussed.

## CLUBS

Clubs that connect and support the interests of LGBTQIA+ students provide benefits to all students.

Clubs with a gender-inclusive focus should run like any other club with clearly defined outcomes. Permission slips for participation are not required unless permission slips are required for participation in all other clubs. Schools may choose to hold optional clubs during the school day, which could occur during lunch or recess, or a dedicated club time, for example. Holding club meetings during the school day makes the group more accessible to students who may have barriers to attending beyond school hours. Please note if students in younger grade levels will miss recess regularly for any club, parents must be notified. Please see [Policy 9090 Wellness Through Nutrition and Physical Activity](#).

Additionally, these clubs should be included in club information dissemination efforts in the same manner as all school sponsored clubs.

Note, that the Equal Access Act (1984), 20 U.S.C. §7905 requires public secondary schools to provide equal access to school premises for extracurricular clubs. It also ensures that non-curricular student groups are afforded the same access to public secondary school facilities as other similarly situated student groups.

## REPORTING DISCRIMINATION/HARASSMENT

It is the intent of HCPSS to provide a safe school environment to all students, which includes students who identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community. Any incident of discrimination, harassment, or violence will not be tolerated. These incidents will be given immediate attention, including investigation of the incident, taking appropriate corrective action, communicating with the students, parents, or others who need to know, and providing students and staff with appropriate resources. Complaints alleging discrimination or harassment based on a person's actual or perceived gender are to be handled in the same manner as other discrimination or harassment complaints, as defined in Policy 1010, Policy 1020, and Policy 1060.

Reports to the Title IX Coordinator should be directed to: [TitleIXCoordinator@hcpss.org](mailto:TitleIXCoordinator@hcpss.org)

Title IX Coordinator  
10910 Clarksville Pike  
Ellicott City, MD 21042  
410-313-6654

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORT AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Consultation and consideration with the Offices of School Counseling or Student Support Programs within the Department of Program Innovation and Student Well-being, and the Division of School Management and Instructional Leadership is encouraged. Consultation with other offices, including the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; the Office of Equity Assurance; the Office of Grants, Policy and Strategy; and the Title IX Coordinator may also be considered.

### Related HCPSS Policies

[Policy 1010 Anti-Discrimination](#)

[Policy 1020 Sexual Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, and Sexual Misconduct](#)

[Policy 1030 Child Abuse and Neglect](#)

[Policy 1040 Safe and Supportive Schools](#)

[Policy 1060 Bullying, Cyberbullying, Harassment, or Intimidation](#)

[Policy 1080 Educational Equity](#)

[Policy 3050 Records Management](#)

[Policy 9050 Student Records](#)

[Policy 9080 Interscholastic Athletic Programs](#)

[Policy 9210 Student Dress Code](#)

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