

PROPOSED POLICY – EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

*Statement from Dan Cates, Superintendent
Township High School District 211
November 14, 2019 Board of Education Meeting
at William Fremd High School*

Since early September, we have communicated with our community about our proposed Equal Educational Opportunities policy. We presented the policy to the District 211 community and to the Board for its first consideration on September 19. In response to comments and questions from our community following the first review, the Board asked that we provide greater detail and understanding for all about the process by which we respond to a family's request for support of transgender students.

To inform people of our practices, we held a special Board meeting on October 10 dedicated solely to the purpose of discussing the proposed policy. We detailed the procedures we follow to ensure meaningful support to gender non-conforming students, our protections for the rights of ALL students, and we provided written responses to many frequently asked questions.

On October 17, the Board again heard a variety of viewpoints in our community and discussed the policy. We believe it is time now to move forward with this policy, though we would not plan to implement it until the start of second semester in January so that we can communicate with students, parents, and staff members throughout the District on how it will work in our locker rooms.

The proposed policy is based on a model policy prepared and distributed by the Illinois Association of School Boards. Many other districts in our area, and many throughout the state, have adopted a similar policy without disruption, incident, or controversy.

Publicly and transparently, our detailed procedures articulate the careful and caring steps we take in our schools.

We know that people's concerns and perceptions are heartfelt. Regardless of whether you support or oppose the adoption of this policy, we all share the same mission and purpose of supporting the young people in our schools to have the best possible learning environment and navigate the challenges and opportunities of young adulthood in healthy ways.

One of the biggest concerns we continue to hear is the idea that anyone can go in any locker room whenever they feel like it – as if a different gender can be declared at will. That's not the way it works in District 211. Upon a request from the student's parent or guardian, a student's stated gender in the official school record establishes the student's gender for

access to gender-specific facilities. Our procedures require the involvement of parents with the knowledge and support of our trained staff members.

Once a family requests a change in a student's stated gender, the student, their parents, and the school will work collaboratively to develop a Gender Support Plan. Access to gender-specific facilities by transgender or gender non-conforming students may take place only as articulated in a Gender Support Plan developed in partnership between the family and school personnel.

For years, transgender and gender non-conforming students have used our restrooms without notice or disruption. For four years, transgender and gender non-conforming students have had access to our locker rooms – again, without any disruption among students.

Four years after implementing our practices to support locker room access, we know the following:

- Our own direct experience shows that providing locker room access based on gender identity has resulted in no disruption in our locker rooms.
- Other school districts that allow locker-room access without any limitation as to where transgender students may change clothes have successfully implemented such policies without disruption and in a manner that protects the interests of all students.
- And, as people become more informed about and accepting of gender non-conforming students, our District and our students are prepared to respectfully ensure equal access to our locker rooms without restriction.

Thank you for the many messages we have received and for your thoughtful and respectful comments this evening in support of this district and all our students. In District 211, our students and our staff members respect and honor all individuals. We stand ready with understanding and support to adopt this policy.