

PROPOSED POLICY – EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

*Statement from Dan Cates, Superintendent
Township High School District 211
October 17, 2019 Board of Education Meeting
at James B. Conant High School*

At our Board of Education meeting held on September 19, 2019, the policy committee and the administration presented the proposed Equal Educational Opportunities policy to the Board for its first review. Upon listening to comments and questions from our community, the Board understood that people sought greater understanding 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, 2019 dedicated to the sole purpose of discussing the proposed policy. Prior to the special Board meeting, we detailed the process we follow to ensure meaningful support to gender non-conforming students and protections for the rights of ALL students. We also provided written responses to many frequently asked questions. The purpose of all, was to provide greater understanding for everyone about the caring and careful steps we take in our schools, and to put to rest the thought that students will be able to indiscriminately choose a locker room on a daily basis, rather than the controlled and sensitive process that our schools adhere to.

We know that people's impressions and perceptions are heartfelt no matter where they stand on this issue. Regardless of what color you wear this evening, or which side of this cafeteria you selected to sit on, we are all here for the shared purpose of helping the young people in our care – your sons and daughters – to navigate the challenges and opportunities of young adulthood in healthy ways.

Prior to hearing more voices again this evening, I offer the following details to ensure that everyone has an accurate account of our procedures and that people understand the measures we take.

Transgender students are those who consistently assert a gender identity different from their sex assigned at birth. The claim that this policy will allow any male student to access a women's restroom or locker room ***is not accurate.***

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 measures 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 parent or guardian, 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, including an administrator.

A student's individualized gender support plan is the official document articulating the supports that will be provided, including which restrooms and locker rooms a student will use. 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 disruption.

Many people are familiar with the terms of our agreement with the Federal Office for Civil Rights to support a transgender student's access to the locker room of the student's stated gender identity. Currently, a gender non-conforming student may access the locker room of the student's stated gender with the agreement that the student would change clothes in one of several privacy areas in the locker room.

Some might ask, why we are changing our practices now when they seem to be working? History is replete with practices founded on a lack of familiarity and uninformed misunderstanding. Whereas the laws regarding access to locker rooms based on a student's stated gender identity were not explicitly clear four years ago, existing laws and legal rulings are now definitively clear.

Our locker rooms rarely, if ever, have any students who are nude. Very few, if any students use our showers. Our locker rooms are large spaces, from 6,000 to 8,000 square feet, separated by walls of lockers that limit students' vision only to those in their immediate area. Our locker rooms provide private changing spaces for any student to use. Our locker rooms can easily accommodate a change in the location of a student's locker, and we will support any student's request for a such a change.

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 not resulted in 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

I would also like to address another misunderstanding that we have heard surrounding this policy. For years, and without incident, we have supported participation of gender non-conforming students on the athletic teams of a student's stated gender. This policy confirms our past practice and the similar support from the Illinois High School Association.

The proposed policy surrounding equal educational opportunities will **not** be voted upon tonight. We recommend that the Board consider its adoption at our Board of Education meeting scheduled for Thursday, November 14.

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.