

Summary for Cañon City School District's Transgender Student Policy Work Group

Summary

The Transgender Student Policy Work Group was productive and agreed on eleven recommendations to improve the District's transgender student policy and two recommendations for the district outside of the policy. The group agreed to several policy changes to increase transparency and understanding and clarity regarding parental involvement, and other improvements to the policy.

The Working Group

The Transgender Policy Working Group was held on November 28th, 2022 and was composed of three different stakeholder groups: interested stakeholders, essential stakeholders, and District administrative staff. Interested stakeholders were selected via a call for letters of interest and were selected after scoring against a rubric and considerations to ensure a diversity of positions were represented on the Group. Essential stakeholders were identified by district leadership and included local representatives from Cañon City Policy Department, Department of Health Services, Pueblo Community College, and Solvista Health. District staff were included based on their proximity to the issue at hand and included the Superintendent, High School Principal and Wellness Coordinator.

The Process

The group first spent the day with extended introductions, which allowed participants to get to know one another and the perspective they bring to the conversation. The group then learned how the district currently engages with transgender students at Cañon City School District. They learned the history of the law, why the policy was brought to the attention of the board, how the school district currently handles transgendered students, the well-being of transgendered students, and state and federal legal constraints and authority on the issue. Work group participants' questions generated great discussion during this time. This process created a shared reality of the considerations the school district faces in serving all students and the legal parameters surrounding the issue of inclusion of transgender students.

The group then broke up into committees of 5 to discuss proposals to improve the transgendered policy at Cañon City Schools. Any member could make a recommendation to their group. Upon a recommendation, committee members then voted on each proposal using a fist-of-five framework¹. Only recommendations with 80% consensus would continue on to be considered by the larger Work Group. If

¹ **A fist** means, "I vote NO, and would veto this proposal if I could". **1 finger** means, "I'll just barely go along." or, "I don't like this but it's not quite a no." or, "I don't like it, but I can live with it." **2 fingers** means "I don't much like this but I'll go along." **3 fingers** means, "I'm in the middle somewhere. Like some of it, but not all." **4 fingers** means, "This is fine." **5 fingers** means, "I like this a lot, I think it's the best possible decision."

a recommendation to the committee received more than one fist, it could not continue on for consideration of the entire group. In total, seventeen recommendations were considered by the entire work group. The work group discussed and voted on proposals using the fist of five framework. Proposals became recommendations if 80% of participants reached consensus.

Recommendations

The recommendations that came from the committees were nearly all adopted. Those that were struck down were done by consensus and in favor of a recommendation from another committee. No proposal faced great opposition. In fact, only one fist was recorded in discussing and voting on each of the proposals.

There were several recommendations that sought to clarify the policy and otherwise promote transparency within it:

- Change the term “Gender Nonconforming” be to “Gender Diverse” as part of the document;’
- Include links to relevant state, federal and local laws in the policy;
- Include definitions of Personally-Identifiable Information and what an Educational Record is.
- Throughout Section VII² of the current policy change the term from “Biological sex” to “sex assigned at birth”;
- In Section VII, there is necessary rewording to ensure that both the wording includes 18-year-olds as students and adults are able to make changes on educational records. The current wording created some unnecessary complexity to this section to a lay reader;
- Section XVI: change the district shall have designated spokespersons to “spokesperson or designee”.

Much discussion and thought went into how to appropriately notify parents/guardians of transgender students, and the following recommendations were made:

- Section I of the policy should include language expressing the District’s intent of how they aim to interact with families similar to the following: “The best approach is for schools to work collaboratively with the student and family to meet the needs of the student. The district will work with counselors to navigate situations where the student feels unsafe.”;
- Include the following language or similar in Section V: “in instances where students express reluctance to bring guardians into the conversation, school administration will work with counseling supports to facilitate such a conversation with parent/guardian and student. Only in issues where a credible safety threat is of a concern can the administration withhold such information from the family.”
- Include language stating that prior to the use of accommodations different than sex assigned at birth, the student and parent must notify the school in writing that the student has a consistent gender identity different than the student’s assigned at birth. The group agreed that this written documentation can be captured in the gender support plan currently used by the District.

² References to specific sections of the document are referring to the proposed transgender policy from the July board meeting.

- The work group also recommended that the gender support plan includes communication with CHSSA, if necessary, to streamline processes, and to change the word “advocate” in section XIII to “communicate”.

Other recommendations for the policy are as follows:

- In section XVII, training should be expanded past principals, counselors, teachers, staff and school resource officers, and include all school staff.

In addition to recommendations regarding the policy, the Work Group included recommendations for the district in areas related to the policy:

- Publicly identify how many students are transgendered as part of larger sharing and distribution of demographic information of students at the district;
- Ensure that all parents are aware accommodations available to all students, such as single person bathrooms, private changing facilities and accommodations for overnight travel.

Finally, one issue that was not resolved was the proposal of creating a religious exemption for staff and students’ use of recognized pronouns for transgender students. It is recommended that CCSD obtain a legal review of this proposal from its legal counsel.