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## **An Open Letter to School Districts to Address Transgender Student Rights**


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As the start of another school year approaches, feelings of excitement and possibility are in the air. Parents and families are packing their little ones' backpacks and sending them off to their first days of school. Middle school and high school students are reuniting with old classmates. Teachers, administrators, and other school staff have eagerly prepared for a year of successful learning. What brings all these groups together, what makes a school community great is the common desire to provide a safe and supportive environment that encourages high quality learning for students. In consideration of your students' academic success and well-being, we ask that state and local school districts take the time to acknowledge the diversity that exists in your school community and, in particular, provide a safe and supportive space for transgender and gender non-conforming students? students whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

All young people have the right to safe spaces and it is a school's responsibility to ensure that the rights of all students are honored and protected. A recent [report](#) <sup>[1]</sup> from the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force revealed, that while in grades K-12, transgender individuals reported high rates of harassment (78%), physical assault (35%), and sexual violence (12%). Numbers like these are staggering. But what is even more important for all of us to remember is that behind each of these numbers are the young people who are in school to learn not to be harassed or violated. Like all students, transgender students count on their schools to keep them safe. Bullying and harassment negatively affect ALL students.

In order to create safe, supportive environments for transgender and gender non-conforming students, school districts should require mandatory professional development for all school staff and faculty; create, revise, and implement anti-discrimination and anti-bullying policies that enumerate sexual orientation and gender identity and expression; support student-driven Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) or other student organizations focused on supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth; as well as create gender-neutral restrooms so that all students can access facilities safely and comfortably.

To ensure that transgender students get off to a good start for the 2013-14, school year we encourage you to access the following resources:

- To enact and/or enforce model policies that address gender-based violence and bullying visit the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network's (GLSEN) resources on policies that matter to protect transgender students.
- To get more information on educator professional development go to <http://glsen.org/article/educators-support-trans-and-gnc-students> [2]
- To access more information on Transgender Student Rights go to <http://glsen.org/students/tsr> [3]
- To create safe and supportive environments by addressing bullying and harassment go to [stopbullying.gov](http://stopbullying.gov).
- To support Gay Straight Alliances within your school district that help eradicate transphobia and homophobia visit the GSA Network: [www.gsanetwork.org](http://www.gsanetwork.org). [4]
- To meet the needs of transgender youth check out [these tips and strategies](#) [5].
- To ensure your students know their [rights](#)  [6] and make sure you know yours. See how a student who has experienced bullying, harassment, or discrimination they may be able to [file a report with the Office of Civil Rights](#) [7].

We want you to be involved and engaged in your students' learning, and we believe that providing these tips and resources for meaningful interaction with transgender and gender non-conforming students is very important. We salute those school districts that continue to provide and maintain safe and supportive environments for all of their students and we hope you have a very successful start to the new school year!

- Advocates for Youth, Task Force, NCTE, GLSEN, GSA Network

Press Release

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/blogs-main/advocates-blog/2...> [8]

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### Links

[1] [http://www.thetaskforce.org/reports\\_and\\_research/ntds](http://www.thetaskforce.org/reports_and_research/ntds)

[2] <http://glsen.org/article/educators-support-trans-and-gnc-students>

[3] <http://glsen.org/students/tsr>

[4] <http://www.gsanetwork.org>.

[5] <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/498?task=view>

[6] [http://www.transequality.org/Resources/EducationKnowYourRights\\_June2012.pdf](http://www.transequality.org/Resources/EducationKnowYourRights_June2012.pdf)

[7] <http://community.pflag.org/claimyourrights>

[8] <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/blogs-main/advocates-blog/2205-an-open-letter-to-state-and-local-school-districts>