

Democracy and Education

What School Board Candidates Need to Know About: **Transgender Children**

Overview

Because 1.4 percent of young people from the ages of 13-17 identify as a different gender from what they were thought to be when born, most schools should expect that some students will need support as they explore their gender identity.

Background

Transgender is a broad term used to describe people whose gender identity is different from the gender they were thought to be when born. (“Trans” is often used as shorthand for transgender.) Although the percentage of transgender adults was thought for decades to be fairly steady at about .6 percent of the population, [in recent years the number of young people identifying as transgender has increased](#), probably because of increased social acceptance, public information, and medical care.

Being transgender is normal—[historical references go back thousands of years](#)—and it is important for schools to create a supportive environment for all young people to feel safe to be who they are. Many Americans believe and support this idea.

Unfortunately, trans children and their families have become a particular target of right-wing extremists. In their ongoing efforts to sow distrust of educators and undermine support for public education (see [“Extremist Threat to Public Schools.”](#)), extremists are making life worse for transgender children.

As part of this campaign, extremists have accused educators of being “groomers” and worked to remove books from school and public libraries that provide information to children about being transgender. They have introduced hundreds of anti-trans bills across many states and spread misinformation about gender-affirming care, falsely claiming that many children who transition later regret it.

The fact is that “gender-affirming care” for children mostly involves what is known as social transitioning, meaning allowing them to try out new names and clothing. As children reach puberty, they are sometimes given puberty blockers to give them more time to consider their medical choices. Only after years of social transitioning and assessment—and when they are old enough to give informed consent—are young people able to access hormone therapy and surgery. [Regret rates are extremely low](#)—much lower, for example, than regret rates for knee replacement and heart surgery.

Access to gender-affirming care helps reduce [suicidality among transgender youth](#), and [feeling safe at school has been found to reduce mental health issues](#). Knowing this adds urgency to providing support to children who explore their gender identity. Adults should also remember that most young people already welcome and understand gender diversity; when they see the adults in their lives failing in this regard, it causes them to lose trust in adults more broadly.

Questions to ask in your school district

General Questions **Ask district officials** what policies are in place to ensure that all children are welcomed and respected. Does every student have a trusted adult they can go to? How many children in the district have attempted suicide in the past five years? Has the district investigated to understand the root causes? How does the district handle bullying? **Ask students** if they feel respected and welcomed. Ask them if they have been bullied and how the school handled the issue. **Ask parents** if they and their children are welcomed and respected. If their children have been bullied, are they satisfied with the school's response? **Trans-specific questions** **Bathrooms and locker rooms.** Do trans students have access to bathrooms and locker rooms that align with their gender identity? (Some districts are exploring the creation of gender-neutral bathrooms and locker rooms.) **Name and gender-marker changes.** Is there a way to change a student's gender marker in school and district computer records before a legal change has been pursued? Is there a space in the record-keeping system for a trans student's new name, so that teachers don't get confused and report cards aren't issued with a deadname? ("Deadname" refers to a trans person's birth name that they no longer use.) **Teacher/staff training.** Does the district provide training and support to teachers and staff so that they understand the challenges faced by trans children?

Note: Laws against discrimination on the basis of sex, including [Title IX](#), are the starting point for school and district policies, which should be centered on making schools welcoming to all.

Possible Message to Voters

Trans children are children, and it is our responsibility to ensure that *all* children receive a high-quality education in a welcoming environment.

For More Information:

[The Williams Center at the UCLA School of Law](#) researches transgender issues.

The ACLU tracks [anti-trans legislation](#).

[The National Center for Transgender Equality](#) has a great deal of information.

[National Public Radio's Fresh Air](#) had an interview with Aidan Key, the author of *Trans Children in Schools*.

[Mother Jones](#) has an [article](#) documenting the national campaign behind the anti-transgender laws.

[The New York Times](#) published a [profile of extremist activist Christopher Rufo](#), in which he said LGBTQ+ issues are a potent way to undermine public education.

Please Note: This is a living document that may be edited and changed from time to time.