



RELATED BOARD POLICY: C28 - TRANSGENDER AND GENDER NONCONFORMING STUDENTS

WSD PROCEDURE C28-P2

APPROVAL DATE: 4/1/2024



Superintendent Signature

PRONOUNS

1. **“They” is a neutral pronoun**, but a person’s name is the safest (most respectful) route. If you are aware of a person’s actual pronouns, “they” should not replace them.
2. **The most common pronouns**, “he” and “she” series, are appropriate even if the person has not directly told you so, as long as you have observed them operate within those pronouns around other people with ease and as long you have no knowledge of a different request on their part. If not sure, use their name.
3. **When a person explicitly** states or clarifies their pronouns (i.e., “asserts”), it is not optional to begin to use them regardless of one’s opinion. In addition to being a policy C28 requirement, someone’s pronouns are at least as serious, if not more, than someone’s change of last name.
4. **As a teacher or staff**, you are not required to state your pronouns to the class as you may or may not be comfortable with other people’s assumptions about your gender. However, if you are comfortable doing so, stating your pronouns when meeting a new group makes some students struggling with a sense of belonging encounter a more welcoming classroom climate.
5. **Students are not required** to state their pronouns and it is recommended that you avoid pedagogical situations in which they perceive it to be the case. For example, rather than stating “say your name and your pronouns” say, “let’s introduce ourselves. My name is such and such, and I go by... (add your pronoun if you choose to, remember you are not required). Now it’s your turn, you can say your name and your pronouns if you are comfortable, otherwise just your name is fine.” In this case you are still modeling belonging and inclusive practices while being explicit about the options students have.

6. **Remember that “silence is a message.”** When the teacher states their pronouns but does not explicitly elaborate on the options students have, the perception is created that what the teacher did is now a requirement for everyone. Similarly, if a teacher simply “stays out of it” and avoids a topic, the message is given that the matter (or the person as a whole) may not be regarded or even welcome in that space. The best practice is not to avoid, but to be explicit with our guidance and intentional with our words.
7. **Some students may** be only comfortable discussing their pronouns confidentially rather than in front of the class. Optionally, refer to this form for a quick record keeping tool to ensure student safety and only use it if your specific student has a need for this. Alternatively, you can read more in the second section of this document about best practices when a student changes their pronouns while in your class.
<https://www.glsen.org/activity/pronoun-form-educators>
8. **When you encounter** a pronoun series that is new to you, ask and practice. Do not be afraid to make “honest mistakes” because most people understand that our society has trained us in a very specific way most of our lives.
9. **When you do make a mistake**, simply apologize, and move on. Do not make a big deal of it, do not indirectly force the recipient to linger in that discomfort, and do not center the conversation on you.
10. **Sporadic initial mistakes** aside, it should be obvious that you are making an honest effort. Repeatedly misgendering someone at some point ceases being “accidental” and begins to be perceived as deliberate. When the student feels unsafe and ridiculed due to patterns of deliberate misgendering, the behavior is treated as a case of gender identity-based harassment, as required by board policy and state and federal law.

PRONOUN TRANSITIONS

(When a student asserts a pronoun change)

The guidance below is applicable only in cases when the student has requested the school or you as their teacher specifically to support them in “asserting” a pronoun change as defined by Board Policy C28, with the understanding that your accompaniment may be needed to promote their inter-personal safety within the classroom. However, this process will vary from individual to individual and you should not use this guidance as a strict set of steps, but rather as general advice to get you started.

For upper grades, for example, a student may prefer for you and other adults to stay out of the way in their process of gradually sharing their transition with others. **For lower grades**, on the other hand, students and families may want you to play a more direct role by helping the young student navigate difficult social situations. This guidance serves as one of several

resources at your disposal. Approach your administrator and other team members when a question of this nature arises.

1. **When a student or family** initially approaches you, involve other relevant adults if possible and with the full consent of the student. If you can reasonably gauge that your student feels comfortable sharing and discussing this request with their legal guardians, please do so first. You might learn useful information from them. For lower grades (3rd grade and below), sharing some information with guardians right away may embarrass them, but it is usually best to tactfully share and in a way that does not make your student feel betrayed by you. Guardians are usually attuned to the child's inner explorations of identity in lower grades, with some exceptions. Partner with them in making the student feel safe and supported.
2. **For upper grades (5th grade and up)**, this initial conversation is critical. Sharing information without their consent can breach trust at best and be illegal or put the student in danger at worst. A conversation about one's preferred pronouns is usually something that should remain confidential unless the student requests otherwise. However, there may be cases where you become a mandated reporter if the original conversation yields information that you are required to report, such as the possibility of abuse in the home.
3. **If your student feels unsafe** disclosing this information to guardians, please state this in an email to your administrators (cc counselor and any other relevant team member) and proceed with the rest of the recommendations below. The guardian will not be notified, but the information will not be withheld from them if they request it as long as the team has deemed that the student is likely safe. If the team suspects that the student will be unsafe, information may still be disclosed to parents when requested but concurrent reports should be made, and counselor accompaniment should be provided to the student to ensure their safety and wellbeing.
4. **As soon as possible after the request**, have a one-time discussion with your student where you ask all the questions that come to mind, even the ones you may think are obvious. Best practice is to have another trusted adult present for this. Take notes.
5. **Build yourself first.** Practice and get used to changing your language in the way you address your student so that you can model it for others. It is ok to make mistakes at the beginning but your students should know that you are trying.
6. **If the student wants your support** in sharing this information with others, ask your student whether they are ok with the two of you having a discussion with the class where the request is made to peers to address the student by their pronouns. If the student is not comfortable with this public approach, simply continue modeling it yourself and asking individual questions when asked. If the student is comfortable announcing it, then do it together with them.

7. **Remind the rest** of your students that this is an actual and serious request and that we will respect it. However, (in practice and in your thoughts) be very patient with your students, particularly younger grades, and do not make them feel bad for failing to use the correct pronouns, unless it is obvious to you that a peer is doing it just to be a bully. Give them some time, keep modeling and kindly remind them along the way. Remember that if a student cannot use a correct pronoun, you can help them by inviting them to simply use the person's name. A name is the best pronoun!
8. **If you are not confident** in your ability, or simply not comfortable honoring the student's request, please contact a counselor to accompany you in this initial process. Still, keep in mind that while you may not play an active initial support role, policy still requires that you honor the student's stated pronouns and name and that you maintain proper oversight in regard to their safety and emotional wellbeing.