Souls of Our Students: A Transgender Focus

A Facilitation Guide:

Silence to Safety: Creating inclusive
environments for transgender youth in our schools

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*"This document is intended to be used as a framework to discuss Souls of Our Students: A Transgender Focus and broader topics related to our LGBTQ population in our school systems and beyond. It is a tool for people to talk about LGBTQ topics - specifically **Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Identity** - and what we can learn from one another about our experiences, our current implicit biases, and shaping our future culture."*

<u>PURPOSE</u>

In order to provide a safe and welcoming learning environment for every student, it is important to discuss transgender and gender non-conforming identities and topics in schools and classrooms. The more inclusive a school culture is, the more likely all students feel part of their school community.

<u>OBJECTIVES</u>

There is a strong case for the importance of discussing these topics in the classroom as well as preparing yourself for having one-on-one conversations with students.

1. Foster an understanding and empathy among all the students about transgender identity to help transgender and gender non-conforming students feel more comfortable in school and develop positive self-esteem.

2. Provide all students more knowledge, understanding and empathy to help assist in creating safe, welcoming and more affirming schools and communities.

STANDARDS

North Carolina Essential Standards Health Education - High School

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIPS

Essential Standard: 9.ICR.1 Understand healthy and effective interpersonal communication and relationships.

Clarifying Objectives: 9.ICR.1.1 Illustrate the ability to respond to others with empathy.

MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Essential Standard: 9.MEH.2 Create help-seeking strategies for depression* and mental disorders.

Clarifying Objectives: 9.MEH.2.1 Identify causes and symptoms of depression and mental disorders. 9.MEH.2.2 Design useful help-seeking strategies for depression and mental disorders.

* **Clarification and Understanding:** The American Psychological Association and the National Association of School Psychologists affirm that diverse gender expressions, regardless of gender identity, and diverse gender identities, beyond a binary classification, are normal and positive variations of the human experience. Minority stress is recognized as a primary mechanism through which the notable burden of stigma and discrimination affects minority persons' health and well-being and generates health disparities.

Many gender and sexual orientation diverse children and adolescents have reported higher rates of anxiety and depression, low self-esteem, engaging in self-injurious behaviors, suicide, substance use, homelessness, and eating disorders among other adverse outcomes. Many transgender and gender diverse children and adolescents experience elevated rates of depression, anxiety, self-harm, and other health risk behaviors. "These psychosocial issues are likely related to if not caused by negative social attitudes or rejection (Vance, Ehrensaft, & Rosenthal, 2014)."

Gender and sexual orientation diverse children and adolescents who are victimized in school are at increased risk for mental health problems, suicidal ideation and attempts, substance use, high-risk sexual activity, and poor academic outcomes, such as high level of absenteeism, low grade point averages, and low interest in pursuing post-secondary education. Some studies suggest that transgender and other gender diverse students experience even poorer educational outcomes compared to lesbian, gay and bisexual students, including low achievement levels, higher likelihood of being "pushed out" of high school prior to graduation, low educational aspirations, and high incidences of truancy and weapons possession. "Improved psychosocial outcomes are seen among youth when social supports are put in place to recognize and affirm gender minority youth's gender identities (Vance, et al., 2014)."

Source:
American Psychological Association & National Association of School Psychologists. (2014). Resolution on gender and sexual orientation diversity in children and adolescents in schools. Retrieved from http://www.apa.org/about/policy/orientation-diversity.aspx
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Ending Conversion Therapy: Supporting and Affirming LGBTQ Youth. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 15-4928. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2015. Retrieved from http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA15-4928/SMA15-4928.pdf

BACKGROUND FACTS

- 41% of transgender people have attempted suicide.
- 82% of transgender students feel unsafe at their school due to gender expression.
- Less than a fifth of transgender students said that school staff intervened most of the time or always when hearing negative remarks about someone's gender expression (11%).

- 47% of transgender students reported skipping a class at least once in the past month and 46% report missing at least one day of school in the past month because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable.
- A third of transgender students heard school staff make negative comments about someone's gender expression (39%) sometimes, often, or frequently in the past year.
- 53% of transgender students have been physically harassed (e.g., pushed or shoved) in school in the past year because of their gender expression.

Source:
Greytak, E. A., Kosciw, J. G., and Diaz, E. M. (2009). Harsh Realities: The Experiences of Transgender Youth in Our Nation's Schools. New York: GLSEN.

DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

- **Speak from your own personal perspective**.
- **Listen** to others. The hope is that there may be new shared understanding that comes from listening to each other.

This is not a debate, and you are not trying to come to a singular conclusion but rather to **express and better understand** the multiple realities that may be in the room.

DISCUSSION PROCESS & GUIDELINES

SUGGESTED TIME	SUGGESTED AUDIENCE	SUGGESTED LOGISTICS
60 - 90 minutes (or longer, if appropriate)	- An intact or assembled group 8-10 individuals - In larger groups, divide into smaller groups so that everyone can participate	- Ideally, sit in a circle of chairs or at small tables to allow for more intimate conversation. - Pens/pencils

KEY FACILITOR GUIDELINES

The following guidelines are provided to ensure that everyone is encouraged to speak and that everyone is listening to others.

- Share the purpose of the dialogue (see above) and discussion guidelines.
- **Ask participants to reflect on the questions in silence for 2-5 minutes**. They may write some responses, but that's not essential. A few moments of silent reflection are crucial however.
- Take the questions one at a time and let each person respond before you

move to the next question. These questions are offered as a way to promote dialogue and engage at the personal level before moving to discuss what is happening at the community level – and in so doing increase understanding and connections among group members.

- As much as possible, stay with the questions as listed, but consider asking follow-up questions as needed.
- Make sure everyone has a chance to speak and intervene as necessary when someone speaks too long or gets into solutions. Encourage speaking from a personal perspective rather than sharing the opinions of others. Encourage the use of "I" or "I feel" statements.
- Encourage authentic personal sharing and that people listen and give space to others.
- Summarize and paraphrase and ask follow-up questions as appropriate
- You may not get to discuss all the questions; this is okay.
- In closing, ask how understanding has increased through listening to others' responses to the questions and what participants may have **DISCOVERED** about themselves or others through this process

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & CONVERSATION

1. Have you heard stories about transgender people/topics prior to today? Has this video added anything new to what you have heard/seen in the past?
2. How are you feeling after watching the video? What about your own identity and your personal story inform these feelings?
3. Did you relate to any of the stories shared in the video? Have you ever felt isolated or unsafe at school for any reason? Have you faced bullying or harassment based on part of your identity?
4. When people say they want to talk about struggles faced by transgender individuals, which struggles are they talking about?
5. As a result of today's conversation, what is a possible next step for you?
6. How would you create an inclusive environment for transgender/LGB students at school?
7. How would you support greater understanding between groups of people who disagree on important topics?

Please reach out to your school district administrators, curriculum specialists, your state Department of Public Instruction/Department of Education, or community partners for support and guidelines on facilitation of this topic with classes or groups.

NEXT STEPS

Student Assignment

As a follow up to this discussion, please have students complete the assignment below by scanning the QR Code or by entering the survey URL in a browser. Students can provide a screenshot or copy of this assignment for class credit, but they must copy the document before pressing the 'Done' button on the webpage.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SOOS_studentassignment

Teacher/Facilitator Feedback

Feedback from teachers/facilitators is also important to us. Please take this brief survey about your discussion by scanning the QR Code below or by entering the survey URL in your browser:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SOOS_transfocus

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT & RESOURCES

Organizational Resources

National

- Welcoming Schools – www.welcomingschools.org
- American Civil Liberties Union - www.aclu.org
- Office for Civil Rights - www.hhs.gov/ocr/
- Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) – www.glsen.org
- Gay-Straight Alliance Network (GSA Network) – www.gsanetwork.org
- National LGBTQ Task Force - www.thetaskforce.org
- Lambda Legal - www.lambdalegal.org
- Gender Spectrum - www.genderspectrum.org
- Trans Student Educational Resources - http://www.transstudent.org/
- National Center for Transgender Equality - www.transequality.org
- The Transgender Law Center – www.transgenderlawcenter.org
- Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) - www.pflag.org
  - Local chapters are available

Statewide (North Carolina)

- NC Healthy Schools - www.nchealthyschools.org
- Time Out Youth Center (Charlotte) – www.timeoutyouth.org
- Youth Outright (Asheville) – www.youthoutright.org
- Outright Youth (Hickory/Newton-Conover) - www.outrightyouthcv.org
- LGBT Center of Raleigh - www.lgbtcenterofraleigh.com
- LGBTQ Center of Durham - www.lgbtqcenterofdurham.org
- Inside Out (Triangle Area) - http://insideout180.org/
- Equality NC (Raleigh based, statewide offices) – www.equalitync.org
- Safe Schools NC https://safeschoolsnc.org/

Other Resources

- Speak Up at School: How to Respond to Everyday Prejudice, Bias, and Stereotypes (Teaching Tolerance, PDF available online)
- Bending the Mold: An Action Kit for Transgender Students (Lambda Legal, PDF available online)
- Harsh Realities: The Experiences of Transgender Youth in Our Nation's Schools (GLSEN, PDF available online)
- Guide to Being a Trans Ally (PFLAG, PDF available online)

Let's continue the conversation…

The 2013 National School Climate Survey outcomes highlighted the ways in which school-based support – such as supportive staff, anti-bullying/harassment policies, curricular resources inclusive of LGBT people, and Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) – can positively affect LGBT students' school experiences. It is clear that there is an urgent need for action to create safe and affirming learning environments for LGBT students.

Based on the findings, from the survey the following recommendations were made to create an inclusive environment:

> • Increasing student access to appropriate and accurate information regarding Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) people, history, and events through inclusive curricula and library and Internet resources;

> • Supporting student clubs, such as GSAs, that provides support for LGBT students and address LGBT topics in education;

> • Providing professional development for school staff to improve rates of intervention and increase the number of supportive teachers and other staff available to students;

> • Ensuring that school policies and practices, such as those related to dress codes and school dances, do not discriminate against LGBT students; and

> • Adopting and implementing comprehensive bullying/harassment policies that specifically enumerate sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression in individual schools and districts, with clear and effective systems for reporting and addressing concerns or incidents that students experience. Taken together, such measures can move us toward a future in which all students have the opportunity to learn and succeed in school, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.