



Inclusive Schools Support Guide

Promoting Safe and Inclusive Schools

Internal use for staff only. Not for curriculum purposes.

Staff are responsible for ensuring the safety and security of all students.

CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR STUDENTS

Each day, students walk through the doors of schools across Pinellas County filled with talent, dreams, and infinite potential. It is the responsibility of every staff member to provide an outstanding education that will empower students to grow their gifts and develop the skills they need to be successful, while dispelling harmful stereotypes and prejudices of all kinds to create spaces where every student can learn and thrive.

This guide is for staff and provides a review of federal, state, and local laws and policies, as well as strategies for creating a safe environment for all.

AFFINITY SPACES & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Pinellas County Schools' Professional Development Department will continue to provide affinity spaces in Professional Learning Network (PLN). Affinity groups are employees linked by a common interest or purpose such as religion, gender, ethnicity and race. These affinity spaces are designed to foster a sense of belonging and inclusion among educators by providing a space to connect, share experiences, and support one another. All affinity space titles and descriptions need to be approved by the Director of Professional Development.

It's important to note that while these affinity spaces are a valuable resource for personal and professional growth, they will not count for points toward recertification. Instead, they are a complementary initiative aimed at enhancing the overall staff experience for employees within the district. Join us in embracing diversity, building relationships, and creating an inclusive educational community through the affinity spaces in Pinellas County Schools. For additional information about affinity spaces, please reach out to Janet Harris at harrisjan@pcsb.org.

To further facilitate a safe and supportive school environment for all students and staff, Pinellas County Schools offers multiple professional development opportunities. Please review the monthly Chalk Talk newsletter for up-to-date trainings offered throughout the district. All trainings connect directly to the Pinellas County Schools' Vision of 100% Student Success; the Mission to Educate and Prepare Each Student for College, Career, and Life; the PCS Core Values; and align to the Bridging the Gap Plan.

As with other efforts to promote positive school culture, all staff have access to the Prevention Office Resource Library to enhance personal and professional growth. Please reach out to the Prevention Office at (727) 588-6130 for additional information.

BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

Florida Statute 1006.147 prohibits bullying or harassment of any student or employee of a Florida public educational institution. It also requires each school district to draft a local anti-bullying policy enumerating specific procedures and protected classes.

Staff should proactively create a positive culture and climate within their classroom environment by respecting and caring for all students. Do not ignore name-calling or hurtful teasing nor excuse such behavior. Harassment does not go away on its own. Intervening is always better than ignoring the situation. If a staff member hears or witnesses a harassing, demeaning, or discriminatory language at school, be explicit that it will not be tolerated.

In accordance with federal and state laws, Board Policy 5517.01 (“Policy Against Bullying and Harassment) [\(1\)](#) prohibits bullying and harassment in schools against students and staff for any reason, including sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. Staff should ensure that this Policy is consistently implemented schoolwide. Any allegations and instances of bullying and/or harassment shall be handled in accordance with Policy.

All written and verbal reports of bullying and harassment are required to be entered into an online reporting system. Pinellas County Schools utilizes the Sandy Hook Say Something Anonymous Reporting System and staff are encouraged to have students submit reports of bullying, harassment to www.saysomething.net. If students can’t report, staff can report on their behalf. Please reach out to the Prevention Office at (727) 588-6130 for any questions or concerns regarding bullying, harassment, and teen dating violence and abuse.

DRESS CODE

First Amendment Free Speech and Title IX protect free expression, which includes choice of clothing, subject to local rules, such as our Board Policy 5500.04 (“Dress Code”) [\(2\)](#).

Students may wear clothing of their choice, even if it is not stereotypically associated with their biological sex at birth, so long as they abide by the Dress Code found in The Code of Student Conduct and Board Policy 5500.04 [\(2\)](#).

EQUAL ACCESS

Under the federal Equal Access Act (20 U.S.C. ss. 4071-74) and Board Policy 5730 [\(3\)](#) (“Equal Access for Nondistrict-sponsored Student Clubs and Activities”), student-initiated, student-led noncurricular related student clubs, may obtain access to facilities, resources, and opportunities to advertise that are provided to other student clubs that qualify under the Equal Access Act. Regarding the participation of staff members in Equal Access clubs, the law limits staff participation to essentially a supervisory role – the policy states that “[n]either the Board nor any of its employees shall sponsor such meetings/activities; sponsorship means promoting, leading, or participating in such meetings/activities. The assignment of a teacher, administrator, or other school employee to such meeting/activities for custodial purposes shall not be construed as sponsorship of the meetings/activities, and such employees’ presence shall be strictly non-participatory.”

Students interested in establishing an Equal Access student club, such as a GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance or Gender and Sexualities Alliance) or a FCA (Fellowship of Christian Athletes) club, will be allowed to form such clubs within the parameters of federal and state laws. GSAs or other student-initiated and led noncurricular related clubs allow students to gather and engage in discussions around common interests. GSAs are made up of students of any sexual orientation. If a student approaches you about information about starting a GSA or any other Equal Access club, please direct them to their school administrator. All Equal Access clubs must comply with Board Policy 5730 [\(3\)](#).

NAMES, TITLES, AND PRONOUNS

State Board of Education Rule 6A-1.0955 permits school faculty and staff to refer to a student by a name other than the student's legal name with written parental consent.

A preferred name or nickname is a name chosen by an individual for use in lieu of their legal name. Board Policy 8330.01(4) ("Legal Name on Student Records") states that a student's legal name will be used on all official records, but "a student may, however, be addressed by any name the parent requests." With parental consent, teachers and administrators will honor a student's request to use a name that differs from their legal name (Rule 6A-1.0955, F.A.C.). Student registration has always included a field for any desired nickname, but parental consent must somehow be obtained in writing, either in the registration paperwork, PCS Form 3-3204 (5) or via email.

Florida Statute 1000.071 prohibits school employees from asking a student to provide his or her preferred personal title/pronouns. Further, employees may not provide to students the employee's preferred title/pronouns if they do not correspond to the employee's biological sex at birth. Lastly, no employee or student may be required to refer to another person by his or her preferred title/pronouns if such does not correspond to that person's biological sex at birth.

For students and/or parents who wish to have their student's preferred pronouns used, upon receipt of written parental consent, staff will honor this request, but are not required to do so. If a student makes a request to use pronouns other than those that correspond to their sex at birth, the student must be advised to have their parent contact the school and provide the required written consent mentioned above.

OUTSIDE MEDIA AND COMMUNITY COMMUNICATIONS

Media inquiries about issues related to gender identity should be referred to the Pinellas County School Office of Strategic Communications and can be reached at (727) 588-6122. Rather than directly commenting on the issue, Pinellas County School staff should direct inquiries from families or the immediate school community to the principal.

PARENTAL RIGHTS

Florida Statute Chapter 1014, entitled "Parents' Bill of Rights," contains various provisions regarding the fundamental right of parents to direct the upbringing, education, and care of their minor children. Various other statutes ensure parental rights, such as Florida Statute 1002.20.

Further, Florida Statute 1001.42 requires districts to adopt procedures regarding parental notification and involvement related to a student's mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being.

Pinellas County Schools has always honored parents' rights to be included in their children's education and adjusts its practices in alignment with state laws. The School Board has adopted Policy 5500.015 ("Parents' Bill of Rights") (6) to address these issues.

Staff must notify a student's parent if there is a change in the student's services or monitoring related to the student's mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being. Staff must encourage a student to

discuss issues relating to his/her well-being with his/her parent or to facilitate discussion of the issue with the parent. Staff may not discourage or prohibit parental notification of and involvement in decisions affecting a student's well-being.

The simple knowledge of a student's sexual orientation and/or gender identity, without related concerns about the student's health, safety, or well-being, would not be considered a change in services or monitoring. For parents who have questions about their child being LGBTQ+ and have contacted the school district, faculty and staff cannot withhold information about their child's identity unless a reasonably prudent person would believe that disclosure would result in abuse, abandonment, or neglect, as those terms are defined in Florida Statute 39.01. Students must be encouraged to speak with their parents about sensitive and personal information. Remember, staff are responsible for ensuring the safety and security of all students.

PARTICIPATION IN ATHLETICS

Florida Statute 1006.205 governs student participation in athletics. In part, the law states that "athletic teams or sports designated for females, women, or girls may not be open to students of the male sex." It further states that, "athletic teams or sports designated for males, men, or boys may be open to students of the female sex."

In alignment with state law, a student's birth certificate, issued at or near the student's time of birth, will be used to determine the student's sex for participation in school athletics.

RESTROOMS/ CHANGING FACILITIES

Florida Statute 553.865 requires schools to maintain separate restrooms and changing facilities for the exclusive use of males, females, and/or unisex restrooms and changing facilities. Unisex rooms are single-use rooms with the ability for the user to lock the door from the inside. The same law prohibits a person from entering a restroom or changing room designated for the opposite biological sex at birth, except under limited circumstances.

As required by law, Pinellas County Schools separates multi-user restrooms and changing facilities (ex., locker rooms) according to biological sex at birth. All schools have unisex restrooms and can provide private changing facilities, where needed.

Any questions related to student accommodations should be addressed on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the student's parents and school administration/leadership to ensure safe environments are maintained.

SAFE SPACE POSTERS/STICKERS

Displaying Safe Space stickers, FCA stickers, small personal religious items, Pride flags, or other similar items are not prohibited by law. Staff display of items should not distract from the learning environment or replace tools for instruction. Remember that Florida law prohibits the delivery of classroom instruction regarding sexual orientation or gender identity in grades preK-12, except as explicitly required by State Standards or as part of a reproductive health class or lesson for which parents may opt out.

It only takes one person to make a potentially life-changing difference for a youth who is suffering. While there are many ways teachers and administrators can facilitate a safe environment for all students, one of the most widely recognized methods is by creating a classroom environment that is safe, welcoming, and inclusive for all.

STATISTICS

Harassment, bullying, and discrimination can lead youth to feel unsafe. On the 2021 Florida Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 23.7% [\(7\)](#) of middle school students and 12.7% [\(8\)](#) of High school students reported they have been bullied on school property. 18.9% [\(9\)](#) of middle school students and 11.5% [\(10\)](#) of high school students reported were the victim of teasing or name calling because someone thought they were gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Providing a holistic approach is essential in creating a safe space for all students at school.

In 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that suicide was the second leading cause of death for people aged 10–24 and among the top four leading cause of death for the individual age groups 10–14, 15–19, and 20–24 [\(11\)](#). On the 2021 Florida High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 8.9% of high school students reported they attempted suicide [\(12\)](#).

Pinellas County Suicide rates are among the highest in the state of Florida. Data from the Florida Department of Health indicates that in 2021, Pinellas reported 184 deaths by suicide which gave us a per capita rate of 16.6. Of the top 10 counties by population, Pinellas County has the second highest rate of death by suicide following Brevard County, which has a rate of 19.4.

Educators have a professional, ethical, and legal obligation to address the unique needs of all students to reach the district vision of 100% Student Success. Pinellas County Schools will continue to provide support and resources to create safe and supportive school environments for all. For additional support, please reach out to the Prevention Office at (727) 588-6130.

APPENDIX: DEFINITIONS

Below are some terms currently used by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This list and the definitions offered may change over time.⁽¹³⁾

Bisexual: A person who is attracted to both people of their own gender and other genders.

Cisgender: Individuals whose current gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gay: A person who is attracted primarily to members of the same gender. Gay is most frequently used to describe men who are attracted primarily to other men, although it can be used for men and women.

Gender: The cultural roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes expected of people based on their sex.

Gender Expression: How an individual chooses to present their gender to others through physical appearance and behaviors, such as style of hair or dress, voice, or movement.

Gender Identity: An individual's sense of their self as man, woman, transgender, or something else.

Gender Minority: Individuals whose gender identity (man, woman, other) or expression (masculine, feminine, other) is different from their sex (male, female) assigned at birth.

Gender Nonbinary: Individuals who do not identify their gender as man or woman. Other terms to describe this identity include genderqueer, agender, bigender, gender creative, etc.

Gender Nonconforming: The state of one's physical appearance or behaviors not aligning with societal expectations of their gender (a feminine boy, a masculine girl, etc.).

Heterosexual or Straight: A man who is primarily attracted to women or a woman who is primarily attracted to men.

Intersex: Persons with variations in physical sex characteristics, including variations in anatomy, hormones, chromosomes, or other traits, that differ from expectations generally associated with male and female bodies.

Lesbian: A woman who is primarily attracted to other women.

Queer: An umbrella term sometimes used to refer to the entire LGBT community.

Questioning: For some, the process of exploring and discovering one's own sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Sexual Minority: Individuals who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, or who are attracted to or have sexual contact with people of the same gender.

Sexual Orientation: Refers to a person's sexual and emotional attraction to another person and the behavior and/or social affiliation that may result from this attraction (lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc.)

Transgender: Individuals whose current gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.



**PINELLAS
COUNTY
SCHOOLS**

Vision:

100% Student Success

Mission:

Educate and prepare each student
for college, career and life.