

# The Inherent Dignity and Worth of Every Student, No Exceptions

## **WHERE WE CAME FROM**

In the 90's and early 2000's, there was horrific, open bullying of gay students and tacit powerlessness from teachers. Even students merely suspected or rumored to be gay suffered daily abuse, sometimes physical, typically bitterly vocal. Students said, "That is so gay," as a synonym for disgust and disapproval of even inanimate objects.

- Example: Some students asked a teacher to start a gay/straight alliance club. The teacher asked the principal for permission. The principal's response: "But there are no gay kids at our school."
- Example: a teacher giving a lecture on British writer E.M. Forster said of one of his novels: "It's largely autobiographical about his life as a gay man. I can forgive him that, but I can't forgive that the book was a failure."

By the 2010's, things began to change. There were more GSA clubs, more openly gay students, the homophobic slurs got called out, it was less of an open season on gay kids and became a more tolerant and inclusive climate for many.

## **WHERE WE ARE NOW**

- The pendulum seems to be swinging back toward intolerance.
- Pride Flags are banned, although the enforcement appears lax.
- Teachers have been instructed to use the names and pronouns that appear on their class rosters, not what kids have requested, unless they ask a guidance counselor to clear that request with the student's parents. Again, lax enforcement and zero clarification of teachers' questions.
- We hear repeated attacks on trans students at public comment.
- Roughly half of the challenged books feature LGBTQ and/or BIPOC characters.
- Some community members accuse our faculty of introducing "gender ideology." They believe, without evidence, that teachers are using their position to persuade kids to experiment with LGBTQ lifestyles, as if these are choices and not matters of identity.

## **Advocates for Inclusive Education**

Position Paper: Dignity & Worth of Every Student, June 2023

- Teachers meanwhile are not and have never been interested in students' sexuality or gender identity. Teachers are concerned with students' brains, their intellects, their development as thinkers and learners. Other than providing a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment, teachers neither know nor involve themselves with how their students choose to express their sexuality or self-identify. It is not and has never been part of any teacher's job description or calling to lead kids away from their subject.

### **WE BELIEVE**

- Teachers are far, far too busy trying to teach math, science, literature, world languages, social studies, and all the rest to concern themselves with student sexuality and identity. Nothing could be further from teachers' authority, expertise, or interest.
- What teachers are keenly interested in is guaranteeing that every child in their classroom feels safe enough to learn the subject. Sometimes that means putting up a pride flag. Sometimes it doesn't. This is a judgment best left to our professional staff.
- The whole discussion of transgender issues at school board meetings is bizarrely irrelevant to our schools. This is a matter of identity within a person and that person's family. Decisions about medical intervention are made within families. The schools have nothing whatsoever to do with any of it.

### **WHERE WE WANT TO GO**

We want to see all kids feel sufficiently safe in their classrooms that they can learn. We want all children, from all backgrounds, of all identities, to know that their teacher welcomes them and wants to see them flourish academically. This conveys neither approval nor encouragement—merely acceptance and adherence to best practices.

We want to see families secure in the knowledge that matters so intimate and private as sexuality are not addressed in the classroom except as they arise either in the curriculum or in student-initiated discussion. This has always been the case and we never needed a policy to threaten teachers to make it so.