



# Advancing LGBTQ+ Justice and Transgender Advocacy



## Pre-Attendance Package

UniServ Directors will gain a deeper understanding of the LGBTQ+ community and the issues critical to providing support and guidance that is not only inclusive but liberating.

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## **Why Pre-Attendance Assignments?**

The resources compiled here are short, relevant and intended to help you shift from the day-to-day cognitive load of work to the thinking you will use as a learner at the academy. We rely on a number of popular education strategies that involve the use of texts and scenarios for group work. Many participants find it difficult to do a “first read” in the classroom so we have provided those items here in case you would like to review them.

## **Please Do Before Arriving**

### **1. Read and Reflect (pages 3-5):**

Please take the time before arriving to read out community agreements. We will engage you in a discussion at the very start of our time together around these agreements and your commitment to them.

### **2. Key Terms (pages 6-11):**

In order to have thoughtful and frank discussions on these issues, we need to be able to communicate. Recognizing that language around LGBTQ+ issues shift and change every two years, staff members at NEA compile and actively revise a list of key terms that we will be using during this academy. Please familiarize yourself with these terms so that vocabulary isn't a barrier to your participation.

### **3. Resources for Scenario Work (pages 12-15):**

The scenarios are for group work. They will require some attention to the details. You should set aside some time to read and review these prior to coming especially if you are not comfortable doing a “first read” amongst others. It is not imperative that you memorize them, just become familiar with them.

### **4. Gender Unicorn (16-18):**

Print and complete the fillable Gender Unicorn. For additional support, visit [www.transstudent/gender](http://www.transstudent/gender). It is not imperative that you memorize them, just become familiar with them. Once complete, reflect on the following questions:

What has been made clearer to you after using this tool?

Now we will be continuing to discuss gender, what is still unclear that you would be looking forward to learning more about?

### **Optional Food for Thought (pages 19 and Beyond):**

These resources have been provided to help frame some of the practical reasons we are offering this academy. We may reference these in our work together, and it may cause you to generate questions that you will want to explore while we are together.

# **Community Agreements for Our Time 2026-27 Program Year**

## **Encourage and Practice Awareness and Self-Knowledge**

This work requires self-knowledge and self-awareness. Self-knowledge allows you to see the triggers that can lead to pain and conflict, enabling you to embrace your contradictions and inconsistencies. It allows the space to work on things that you are not happy with about yourself. In turn, self-awareness helps to prevent you from projecting negativity onto other people. By engaging in self-reflection, you contribute to a learning environment rooted in awareness, accountability, and shared purpose.

Bringing your best self also requires that you have an attitude of curiosity, are willing to deeply explore your perspectives, and remain open to the perspectives and experiences of others. While engaging with peers and content, remember to make space for others to engage as well.

## **Listening for Understanding**

Be an active listener. Active listening involves paying full and careful attention to the other person, avoiding interruptions, reflecting your understanding, clarifying information, summarizing the other person's perspectives, and/or sharing your own. Remember that we all arrive in this space socialized about what active listening "looks like."

Be open to how others may be signaling that they are listening and be aware that it might look different than how you were socialized. This can help contribute to the development of a space that is brave enough for us to learn together. Remember that most people need time to open up and might not be willing to immediately share their personal stories, hopes, fears, and/or concerns.

## **Being Kind and Gracious**

Being kind is a vital way of bringing meaning to our own lives and to the lives of others. Kindness is about caring genuinely for those around you, wanting the best for them, and recognizing in them the same wants, needs, aspirations and even fears that you may have. Being kind and generous allows us to communicate better, to be more self-compassionate, and to be a positive force in other people's lives.

Being gracious includes following best practices to protect the health of this learning community (eg; avoiding known allergens (scents, foods, etc.), handwashing, using PPE, staying in your room if you are sick).

Being gracious is strongly informed by your own relationship with privilege. Being gracious and kind means not weaponizing your privilege against people who hold more marginalized identities in our space. Instead, use your privilege to support colleagues whose identities yield less privilege than yours. We are gracious when we accept and genuinely work to use the pronouns that others ask us to use. Please consider how your own and others' intersectionality and relationship with privilege may be showing up when you and others offer grace.

As you take your lessons with you when you leave, part of being gracious is keeping folks' personal stories within the learning space.

## **Staying Engaged**

Staying engaged requires you to be fully involved in the conversation. Staying engaged means that you are listening with curiosity and are willing to deepen your understanding. Staying engaged might also require you to sustain the conversation even when it gets uncomfortable or diverted. By actively staying engaged, you are helping to contribute to the creation of a space that is brave enough to allow for learning. This means a commitment to keeping your electronic communications to a minimum with people not present in this learning community. This also means being present for all portions of the learning agenda. If needs (personal or professional) external to the learning experience arise, you commit to moving away from the learning space, addressing the emergency, and then returning ready to re-engage.

### **Staying Curious and Suspending Judgement**

Staying curious and suspending judgement includes being receptive to the perspective of others. You enter this space carrying lived experiences, emotions, and internal narratives that shape how you hear, interpret, and respond. These responses may be influenced by bias—conscious or unconscious—as well as thoughts or feelings not directly connected to what is happening in the room.

You can suspend judgment by reflecting on preconceived notions and listening to everything someone has to say before responding. When something feels uncomfortable, personal, or activating, you commit to pausing, noticing, and approaching your reactions with curiosity rather than judgment. Rather than disengaging, withdrawing, or assuming harm or targeting, ask yourself *What might be influencing my reaction right now?*

Most importantly, suspending judgment also means listening to what the speaker has to say for understanding, not only to determine whether the speaker is right or wrong. This means that you recognize that we all make mistakes and that we have the capacity to grow. You recognize that growth requires attention not only to the words you are hearing, but to how you are receiving them.

### **Saying “I”- Tell Your Truth**

Speaking your truth in authentic and courageous conversations about race and other issues where experiences/perspectives may differ widely from yours requires a willingness to take risks. It means that you will be honest and candid about your own thoughts, feelings, experiences, and opinions and not just say what you perceive others want to hear. If you are thinking it, maybe, just say it instead of waiting to add it to the feedback. Speaking your truth will require you to speak from the “first person” and use “I” statements.

### **Leaning into Discomfort**

Leaning into discomfort will require you to let go of understandings and stereotypes that you may be holding in order to move forward. You take responsibility for practicing self-regulation, staying present, looking for opportunities to take a risk, and seeking understanding. Remain open long enough to fully hear both what is being said, as well as how it is being communicated.

Leaning into discomfort may require you to sit through moments of embarrassment, confusion, anxiety, and/or fear. Leaning in can be highly informed by your own relationship with privilege and can be weaponized against people who hold more marginalized identities in our space. There are times when recognizing your privilege means moving back, and making space for those who are too often marginalized.

### **Expecting Non-Resolution and Non-Closure**

Expect and accept that there may not be closure. For example, it is not likely that you will resolve your personal understanding about race or another person’s racial experience in a single conversation. The more you talk about complex issues with another person, the more you both will learn. Authentic and productive conversations about issues where perspectives may differ widely from yours, are continuous and always evolving. This means that sometimes we will have unfinished, unexplored, and shortened conversations about some concepts.

When appropriate, you may engage, briefly dis-engage, or re-engage by sharing perspectives grounded in reflection, curiosity, and a growth mindset. In holding tension between non-resolution/non-closure and opportunities for engagement/re-engagement, you contribute to dialogue in ways that build understanding rather than shut it down.

*\*Adapted from “Embracing equity and inclusion”, Annie E. Casey Foundation*

## **Reflective Questions to Complete Prior to Attending Your Academy**

What questions do you want to ask about any of the ideas in these agreements?

What additional agreements do you need in order to be a fully participating member of our learning community?

Can you commit to these agreements? If not, what would it take for you to be able to commit?

# KEY TERMS

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*Many of the following definitions are provided by the Human Rights Campaign, a non-profit committed to equity for the LGBTQ+ community, to describe current language related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. This is a limited list. For additional terms related to the LGBTQ+ community, please visit <https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms>.*

## **AGENDER:**

Describes a person who does not have a gender.

## **ALLY:**

A term used to describe someone who is actively supportive of LGBTQ+ people. It encompasses straight and cisgender allies and those within the LGBTQ+ community who support each other (e.g., a lesbian who is an ally to the bisexual community).

## **ANTI-BIAS ANTI-RACIST (ABAR):**

A teaching methodology focused on identity, diversity, justice, and action. ABAR pedagogy helps students develop a strong sense of self-worth, empathize with others, learn the impact of unfairness, and take action when they observe, or experience injustice.

## **ASEXUAL:**

Often called “ace” for short, asexual refers to a complete or partial lack of sexual attraction or lack of interest in sexual activity with others. Asexuality exists on a spectrum, and asexual people may experience no, little or conditional sexual attraction.

## **BIPOC:**

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. The term is meant to unite all People of Color while acknowledging that Black and Indigenous people face different and often more severe forms of racial oppression and cultural erasure due to systemic White supremacy and colonialism. It is a noun, and since it includes the word “people,” it would be redundant to say “BIPOC people.” It is pronounced “buy-pock” as opposed to saying each letter individually.

**BISEXUAL/BI+:**

A term that describes a person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to people of more than one gender, sex, or gender identity.

**CISGENDER:**

A term that describes a person whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth.

**ETHNICITY:**

A grouping of people who share a common set of traditions, ancestry, language, history, society, culture, nation, religion, or social treatment that is different from other groups of people.

**GAY:**

A term that describes a person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to some members of the same gender.

**GENDER DYSPHORIA:**

A term that describes the clinically significant distress a person experiences when their assigned birth gender does not match their gender identity. According to the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), the term—which replaces Gender Identity Disorder—"is intended to better characterize the experiences of affected children, adolescents, and adults."

**GENDER EXPANSIVE:**

A person with a wider, more flexible range of gender identity and/or expression than typically associated with the binary gender system. Often used as an umbrella term when referring to young people still exploring the possibilities of their gender expression and/or gender identity.

**GENDER EXPRESSION:**

The external appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut, or voice, that may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either feminine or masculine.

**GENDER FLUID:**

A person who does not identify with a single fixed gender or has a fluid or unfixed gender identity.

**GENDER QUEER:**

Genderqueer people typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and often, though not always, sexual orientation. People who identify as "genderqueer" may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female or as falling completely outside these categories.

**GENDER IDENTITY:**

An internal, deeply felt sense of being female, male, a blend of both, or neither. Refers to how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. Can be the same as or different from their sex assigned at birth.

**GENDER NON-CONFORMING:**

A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category.

**INTERSEX:**

Intersex people are born with a variety of differences in their sex traits and reproductive anatomy. There is a wide variety of difference among intersex variations, including differences in genitalia, chromosomes, gonads, internal sex organs, hormone production, hormone response, and/or secondary sex traits.

**LGBTQ+:**

An acronym for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer." The "+" represents additional gender identities and sexual orientations that include intersex, agender, and asexual, among many others.

## **LATINE:**

Latine is a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to Latino and Latina. This term originated from LGBTQIA+, gender non-binary, and feminist communities in Spanish-speaking countries. Latine replaces the “a” and “o” with the gender-neutral Spanish letter “e”. The letter “e” can be found in non-gendered Spanish nouns like “estudiante” (student).\*

## **LATINX:**

Latinx is a gender-neutral or non-binary alternative to Latino and Latina. The origin of this term is not fully known, but it is believed that it was first used in the mid-2000s. The “x” does not imply a specific gender, which makes it inclusive of non-binary populations. Latinx is more popularly used in the United States among academic, LGBTQIA+, and non-binary communities. However, some reject this term because the letter “x” was imposed on indigenous languages during Spanish conquest.\*

## **LESBIAN:**

A woman who is emotionally, romantically, and/or sexually attracted to women. This includes cis, trans, and other people who are women.

## **NON-BINARY:**

An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a woman or a man. They may identify as both, somewhere in between, or outside the categories of a woman and a man.

## **PANSEXUAL:**

Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of any gender though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. Sometimes used interchangeably with bisexual.

## **PRONOUNS:**

The words used to refer to a person other than their name. Common pronouns are they/ them, he/him, and she/her. Pronouns are sometimes called Personal Gender Pronouns, or PGPs. For those who use pronouns—and not all people do—they are not preferred, they are essential. For this reason, asking for a person’s “preferred pronouns” is considered offensive. Instead, simply ask, “What are your pronouns?”

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\*For a more nuanced discussion of terminology used by Spanish speakers, please see: <https://cambio.missouri.edu/about/hispanic-latin-latinx-or-latine/>

**QUEER:**

A term people often use to express fluid identities and orientations. This term is often used interchangeably with "LGBTQ+."

**QUESTIONING:**

A term used to describe people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.

**RACE:**

The grouping of humans based on shared physical qualities and/or culture into categories generally viewed as distinct by society; this also comprises one's racial identity. While often assumed to be a biological classification, racial categories do not have a scientific basis. However, the consequences of racial categorization are real, as the ideology of race has become embedded in our identities, institutions, and culture, and is used as a basis for discrimination and racial profiling. How one is racialized is a major determinant of one's socioeconomic status and life opportunities.

**RACISM:**

(1) The belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race; (2) a system of advantages and disadvantages based on one's physical and/or social qualities; and (3) having personal prejudice and bias against others based solely on their physical and/or social qualities. Racism is a historically rooted system of power hierarchies based on race. It is infused in our institutions, policies, and culture, and benefits white people, and hurts people of color.

**SEX ASSIGNED AT BIRTH:**

The sex, male, female or intersex, that a doctor or midwife uses to describe a child at birth based on their external anatomy.

**SEXUAL ORIENTATION:**

An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people.

**SYSTEMIC RACISM:**

Institutional, legalized racial discrimination; rules, practices, and customs that negatively impact some races while benefiting others.

**TRANSGENDER/TRANS:**

An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation.

**TRANSITIONING:**

A series of processes that some transgender people may undergo in order to live more fully as their true gender. This typically includes social transition, such as changing name and pronouns, medical transition, which may include hormone therapy or gender affirming surgeries, and legal transition, which may include changing legal name and sex on government identity documents. Transgender people may choose to undergo some, all or none of these processes.

**TWO-SPIRIT:**

A modern umbrella term used across the U.S. Native American and Canadian First Nations communities to describe Native people who fulfill a traditional third-gender or gender-variant ceremonial and social role in their cultures. Because being Two-Spirit also denotes one's spirituality, not all transgender or non-binary Indigenous people consider themselves to be Two-Spirit. It is not a term appropriate for a non-Native person to use for their own identity. It's an Indigenous term, thereby open solely to Indigenous community members.

## **From our Work—LGBTQ+ Scenarios**

For this activity, you are going to be asked to pick one of three scenarios. In order to be prepared for the scenarios, you should spend some time reading through the following supporting documents for what you selected.

**Scenario 1** deals with a teacher who was disciplined after they presented 7th grade students' "About Me" projects around the room. One of the projects has LGBTQIA+ flags in it. The teacher was directed to remove only that project.

**Scenario 2** involves a school board policy that directed teachers to shelter students in locker rooms based on gender, and the aftermath of keeping a non-binary student sitting on the gym bleachers during an active shooter drill.

**Scenario 3** involves a local community group that identifies the librarian and library paraeducator as groomers and is proposing school board policy that looks to limit LGBTQ+ affirming books available to students in the library.

You will receive more specifics about each of the scenarios during class. For now, please review the information and begin brainstorming how you might support your member and local, should this happen in your own work.

Specific things to think about:

How would you handle this from a service model perspective?

How would you handle this from an organizing perspective?

What documents would you need to help your work?

How would you work with the press?

Scenario #1

You, the union staff, get a call from a building rep and a president. A well-respected teacher and union member, Mrs. J, was given an unfair disciplinary write-up.

The situation: A parent complained that a 7th grade girl's "about me" project showed 4 LGBTQAI+ pride flags. The parent did not come speak to the teacher—she went straight to the school board. On the write up, the principal wrote that Mrs. J didn't show "good judgment" and "clear classroom expectations of appropriateness." In his disciplinary meeting with the member, the principal told Mrs. J that he's a conservative Christian, "we can't promote this here" and asked her if she would allow a Confederate flag or swastika on the wall of her classroom. He also announced that she needs to speak to the students about advertising their sexual orientation at school.

He directed her to turn in lesson plans weekly for his review. He ordered Mrs. J to take down ONLY the project with LGBTQ+ flags and leave every other student project up on the classroom walls. Mrs. J didn't want any student to feel targeted, so she took down every project. Mrs. J and her building rep both tried to talk to the principal and assistant superintendent about this unfair treatment of both students and staff. Neither administrator corrected the issue, and just keep telling Mrs. J that she needs to "understand that parents have opinions too."

The local president and building rep are horrified. There's a history of homophobia in the district, including several union members who fear retaliation from their supervisors. The local officers know their superintendent and school board members well. They believe that the district leadership will back the principal's actions. The president, building rep, and Mrs. J are game to try anything and believe that many of their colleagues would also be horrified. The local isn't familiar with grievances, and doesn't have a grievance chair

As union staff, what do you think the first course of action should be for the member?

What association structures and/or procedures would you advocate for local leaders to implement to prevent future issues such as this one?

What local-wide actions, demonstrations, or activities do you think would be effective in swaying the school board's decision, or public opinion, on the matter?

**Scenario 2:**

You are the UniServ director for a rapidly changing county. The northern portion of the county is quickly becoming a bedroom community for Washington DC while the southern portion of the county is fighting hard to remain true to its rural southern roots. This has led to many clashes regarding local policy, both at the school board and board of supervisor level. Four years ago, you and your teachers sat through a series of increasingly contentious school board meetings regarding the bathroom and locker room policies for a young transgender girl in the fourth grade-the only openly transgender student in the county. During that spring, parents became increasingly hostile and threatening to the board and indicated that they would personally go after the jobs of any employee who allowed this young girl to use the girl's bathroom or locker room. That summer, the school board passed a policy that required the student to use only single stall bathrooms and barred her from using both the boys' and girls' bathrooms or locker rooms.

In the first month of a new school year, you receive a call from a PE teacher at one of your schools. She tells you that earlier that week, the school held one of the state-required lockdown drills during a PE class where that girl, now an 8th grader, is a student. The three PE teachers quickly conferred after realizing that their lockdown procedures, which call for boys to shelter in the boys' locker room and girls to shelter in the girls' locker room, did not take this student into account. This student uses the single stall accessible restroom in the gym when she needs to change or use the restroom during PE class. Without clear guidance-and with the wrath of the parents still echoing in their minds- the teachers had decided to have the PE teacher that is a man take the boys into the boys' locker room, while the PE teacher that is a woman took the rest of the girls into the girls' locker room and the second PE teacher that is a woman remained in the gym with the transgender student.

The PE teacher proceeds to tell you that the mother of the child runs a group called Equality Stafford and has posted on Facebook about the incident. The post calls for community members to pack the upcoming school board meeting and it has quickly gone viral.

How do you support and educate other union members to understand the needs of transgender students and staff?

What might you advocate for in a new policy?

How do you use this issue as an organizing issue?

Scenario #3

You are the UniServ Director in a relatively conservative area. A number of parents have attended the School Board meeting and have complained about the inclusion of material in the curriculum and in the library that is indoctrinating their children. Parents say that the materials are hurtful and confusing to their children and are divisive to a democratic society. They also claim that some of the images are pornographic and want the School Board to remove the books from the school Library. The parents have formed a Protect our Children Group (PCG) who have been emailing the school Librarian and Paraeducator accusing them of grooming children.

They have put forth the following resolution to the school board and are asking for adoption: *The Citizens of Raymond hereby declare, from this point forward, that the elementary children's library in the Dudley School will be free of any books with content containing nudity, gender identity, gender expression, sex or sexual references in writing or illustrations.* The Board has taken it into consideration and will have to take a formal vote on it by the last meeting of the Fiscal year (June).

The school board offers a half hour of public comment at every meeting which is held every month. The PCG has a speaker at every meeting. They focus on protecting children and how pornography traumatizes children and makes them criminals and delinquents.

The local president has tried to address the situation and has spoken to the principal at the elementary school about the emails from the parents. The president has been told that parents have a right to email staff at the school and that there is no policy to stop the communication. The local president does not know what to do and needs help.

The librarian is new and is afraid of being terminated. The para-educator has been employed for over 20 years and is well respected in town. She is also a part-time employee at the Community Library and a member of the Historical Society.

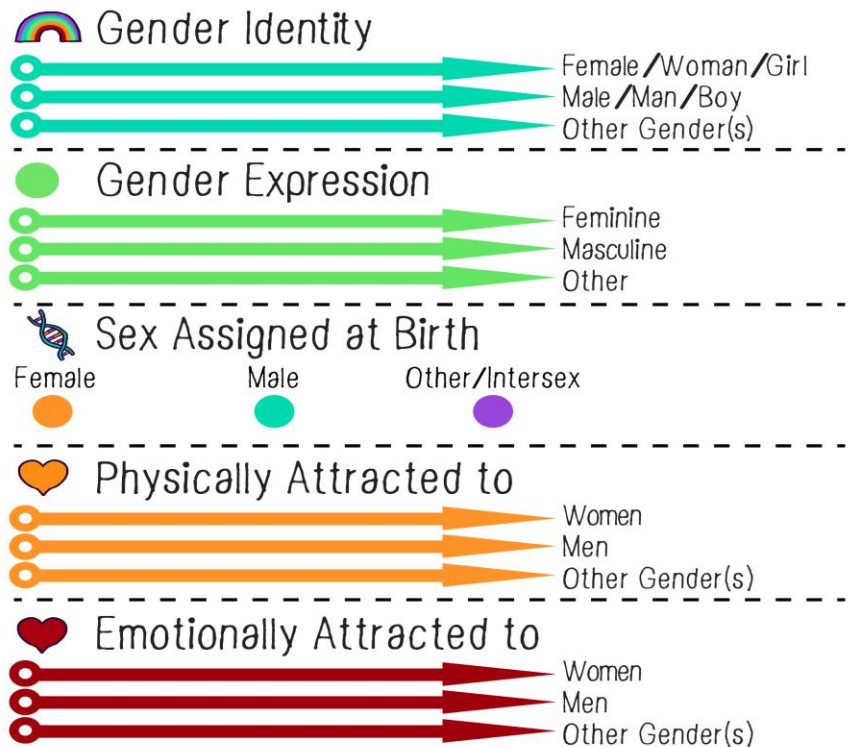
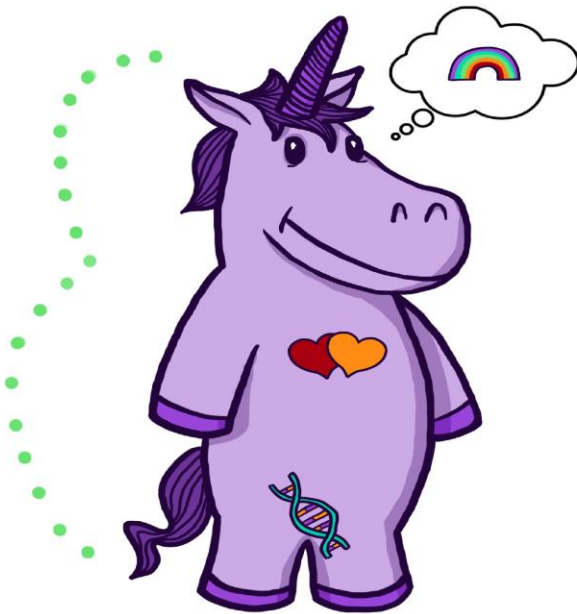
What might you advocate for in a library policy?

How would you frame communication be used for the staff? for the community?

How can this issue be one that unifies versus dividing the school/parents/community?

# The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:  
**TSER**  
Trans Student Educational Resources



To learn more, go to:  
[www.transstudent.org/gender](http://www.transstudent.org/gender)

Design by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore

## Gender Unicorn Definitions



### **Gender Identity:** *How I identify.*

One's internal sense of being male, female, neither of these, both, or another gender(s). For transgender people, their own internal sense of gender identity and their sex assigned at birth are not the same.



### **Gender Expression/Presentation:** *How I look and express myself.*

The physical manifestation of one's gender identity through clothing, hairstyle, voice, body shape, etc. Most transgender people seek to make their gender expression (how they look) match their gender identity (who they are), rather than their sex assigned at birth.



### **Sex Assigned at Birth:** *The sex classification that I was assigned at birth.*

The assignment and classification of people as male, female, intersex, or another sex based on a combination of anatomy, hormones, and chromosomes. This is usually decided at birth or in utero, and is usually based on genitalia.



### **Physically Attracted To:** *Whom I am physically attracted to.*

The group of people or genders to which a person can become physically attracted to, if at all.



### **Romantically/Emotionally Attracted To:** *Whom I am romantically/emotionally attracted to.*

The group of people or genders to which a person can become romantically, emotionally, or spiritually attracted to, if at all.

**Examples of Genders:** We included "other genders" to indicate the many genders that other people might identify as, express themselves as, and be attracted to. Examples of these genders include: Agender, Bigender, Genderfluid, Genderqueer, Transgender, Non-binary, Gender Non-Conforming and Two-Spirit.

# Interactive Gender Unicorn

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

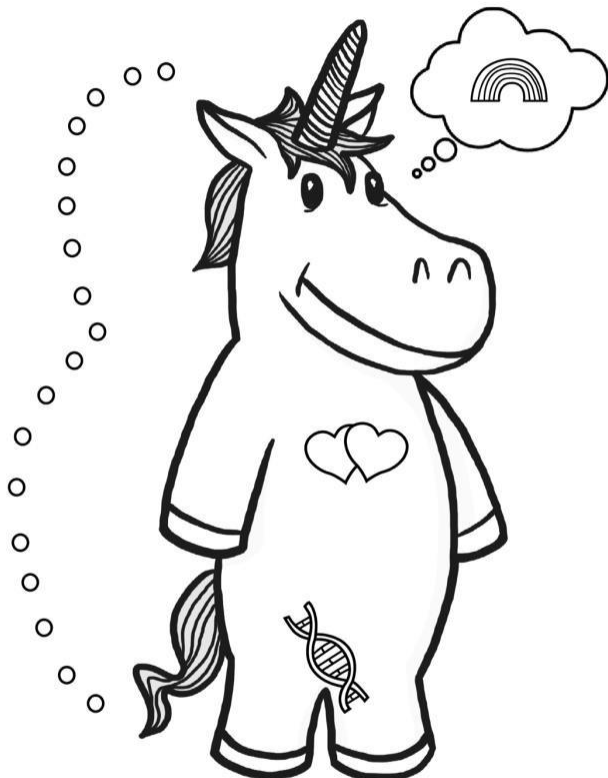
Your pronouns: \_\_\_\_\_

Use your coloring tools to fill in the meters to where they belong for you in each category. You may wish to color in multiple meters in any category and/or may wish to leave some meters blank.

Feel free to make additions or corrections to the sheet.

## The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:  
**TSER**  
Trans Student Educational Resources



Gender Identity

\_\_\_\_\_ Female / Woman / Girl

\_\_\_\_\_ Male / Man / Boy

\_\_\_\_\_ Other Gender(s)

Gender Expression

\_\_\_\_\_ Feminine

\_\_\_\_\_ Masculine

\_\_\_\_\_ Other

Sex Assigned at Birth

Female      Male      Other/Intersex

☐      ☐      ☐

Sexually Attracted To

\_\_\_\_\_ Women

\_\_\_\_\_ Men

\_\_\_\_\_ Other Gender(s)

Emotionally Attracted To

\_\_\_\_\_ Women

\_\_\_\_\_ Men

\_\_\_\_\_ Other Gender(s)

To learn more go to:  
[www.transstudent.org/gender](http://www.transstudent.org/gender)

Design by Landyn Pan  
Illustration by Anna Moore

# Interactive Gender Unicorn

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

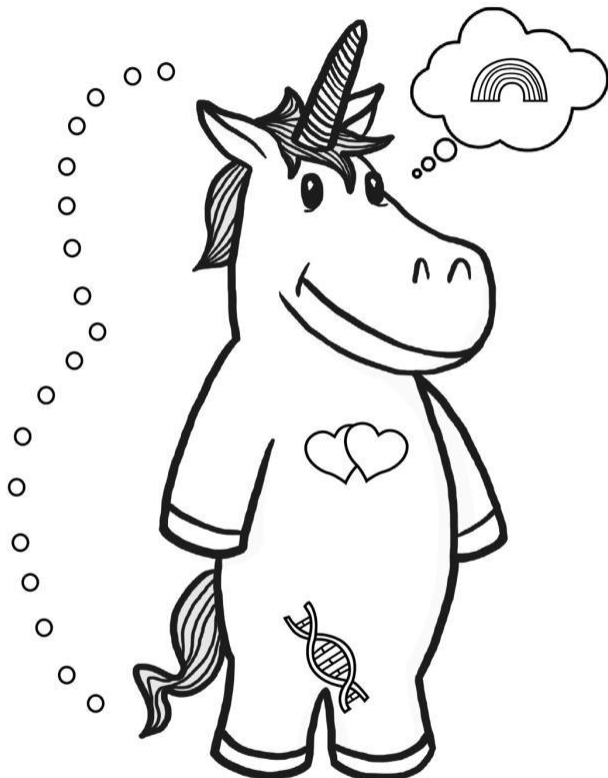
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 Gender Identity

\_\_\_\_\_ Female / Woman / Girl

\_\_\_\_\_ Male / Man / Boy

\_\_\_\_\_ Other Gender(s)

 Gender Expression

\_\_\_\_\_ Feminine

\_\_\_\_\_ Masculine

\_\_\_\_\_ Other

 Sex Assigned at Birth

Female      Male      Other/Intersex

☐      ☐      ☐

 Physically Attracted To

\_\_\_\_\_ Women

\_\_\_\_\_ Men

\_\_\_\_\_ Other Gender(s)

 Emotionally Attracted To

\_\_\_\_\_ Women

\_\_\_\_\_ Men

\_\_\_\_\_ Other Gender(s)

To learn more go to:  
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Design by Landyn Pan  
Illustration by Anna Moore

# Library book ban attempts are at an all-time high. These librarians are fighting back

Arts Updated on Apr 15, 2024 1:32 PM EDT — Published on Apr 11, 2024 5:17 PM EDT  
<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/attempts-to-ban-books-are-at-an-all-time-high-these-librarians-are-fighting-back>

Americans last year challenged more book titles than ever before, according to a new report by the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom.

More than 4,000 unique titles were challenged in public libraries and school libraries in 2023, the most the group has recorded since it began tracking censorship efforts.

Much of that increase came from groups or individuals trying to censor dozens or hundreds of titles at a time, the organization said. It's part of a conservative push across the country to ban certain books based on the claim that they are inappropriate for children. Many of the books were about or written by LGBTQ+ people and people of color.

"The rhetoric about book banning right now is built around this falsehood that books touching on sex or gender identity, sexual orientation, or deal with what's called critical race theory are legally harmful to minors," said Deborah Caldwell-Stone, director of the ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom.

**WATCH MORE:** Judy Blume describes latest wave of book bans and censorship as 'disgusting' and 'fascist'

Librarians are often caught in the middle of these campaigns and state legislative attempts to censor library materials. They've faced criminalization and harassment and in some cases have been fired after refusing to move or remove books.

"I'm not going to let them do this to our library"

Suzette Baker lost her job as a librarian in Llano County, Texas, after refusing to put a third edition of *Critical Race Theory* behind the counter where patrons couldn't find it unless they asked for it.

"Libraries are neutral space. And they should be protected as that neutral space. There's no protections for them," she said. "We need a free library, a library of everything, a library that reflects the good, the bad and the ugly."

She is among the librarians across the country fighting censorship and trying to engage their communities.

## **The PBS NewsHour spoke to six librarians about what they've experienced:**

# **Lawsuits**

Baker said when she was asked to put the critical race theory book behind the counter, “I spoke out and said, this is censorship, we can’t do this, this is not right. And I was subsequently fired.”

Baker is now suing Llano County, county commissioners and community activists appointed to the library board. Her lawsuit claims that she was fired in order for the defendants to discriminate against protected groups, like those who identify as LGBTQ+, as well as suppressed her First Amendment rights.



Suzette Baker was given a list of books to take off the shelves of Kingsland Library in Llano County. Baker refused, and she was fired. Photo by Lauren Witte/The Texas Tribune

“This was never about the books. This was never about protecting people,” Baker said. “The books that they gave me to get rid of were books on racism. They were books on transgender and sexual orientation and questioning for teens.”

She joins several other librarians who have sued their former employers after being fired following book challenges and concerted efforts from the community to remove or move books they find offensive.

Brooky Parks in Colorado won a \$250,000 settlement with her former employer, High Plains Library District, following a civil rights dispute she filed after being fired in 2021. Her firing came after she organized anti-racist and LGBTQ+ programs for teens.

“Teens need those programs,” she told the NewsHour through tears. “If it costs me losing my job or even losing my house, it’s worth standing up for and fighting for. And I know at the end of the day, I will be able to lay my head down and sleep at night.”



Brooky Parks poses for a portrait at office of Rathod Mohamedbhai LLC in Denver, Colorado on Thursday, February 3, 2022. Photo by Hyoung Chang/MediaNews Group/The Denver Post via Getty Images

**[READ MORE: Book ban attempts soared in 2022. Here are the 13 most targeted titles](#)**

Terri Lesley, a library director in Wyoming with more than 20 years of experience, said she endured attacks on her professional judgment from her community in the two years of book challenges that

preceded her firing. Lesley filed a charge of discrimination against the county commissioners who voted to remove her. Her filing says she was “relentlessly harassed...for opposing discriminatory practices” in her association with LGBTQ+ minorities.

In public meetings, she pointed to the widely-used collection development policy that helps guide libraries on how to select and evaluate books. Lesley said she “invited people who did not like the books that we had to go through our challenge process.”

In just a few months, more than 50 challenges flooded in.

“I never had a challenge hit my desk until this [conservative movement] started,” Lesley said. “And then when they came, they came fast.”

The books challenged generally covered sex education and LGBTQ+ identity issues, she said.

Caldwell-Stone with the ALA says there are exceptions for legally obscene material, but most books being challenged are not considered legally obscene and are “protected speech.”

**READ MORE:** [How many book bans were attempted in your state? Use this map to find out](#)



## Taking to politics

Patty Hector was fired from the Saline County library in Arkansas after speaking out against a push from a local conservative group to remove books. That same group organized a billboard campaign against Hector.

Now, she’s running for justice of the peace on the Saline County Quorum Court, which controls library funding. “I’m not going to let them do this to our library,” Hector said. “And we will fight them tooth and nail if they try to take their funding away.”

(Photo courtesy Patty Hector) Caldwell-Stone said political offices and voters can have an “enormous” impact on how libraries operate. In some states, governing boards or voters themselves have withheld funding over debates about book bans and library policies. Politicians, in some cases, can also appoint people to library boards with specific agendas around library materials instead of interest in “operating the library as a community resource,” Caldwell-Stone added.

## Community outreach

Librarians typically view their role as politically neutral, Baker said.

“A librarian is like Switzerland,” Baker in Texas said. “They can’t show their favoritism.”

In her lawsuit, Baker said the library system director told her and other librarians they were “prohibited” from attending public meetings. Caldwell-Stone said arguments made by people seeking these bans in public forums often lack context, which is crucial when legally determining if a published work is obscene and therefore should be removed from library shelves.

“People would show up at board meetings, read spicy excerpts from books, and there would be no countervailing voice to point out that that was one paragraph in a 300 page, you know, award-winning novel,” she said.

*“The entire community is going to have to come together with the librarians in order to stop this”*

Many librarians interviewed by the NewsHour said they knew other librarians who were scared to speak out publicly for fear of retribution.

“The mental damage is done, the trauma is there,” said Becky Calzada, a library coordinator for a large central Texas school district. “I truly believe that’s what keeps many librarians from speaking up.”

Calzada dealt with book challenges to her school libraries in early 2021 when a parent’s speech at a school board meeting asking to remove a book that included a sex toy went viral.

Calzada said there was “a lot of push from the community” on getting books they felt were inappropriate out “with a quick urgency,” rather than going through official channels.

Calzada co-founded FReadom Fighters, a group of librarians that advocate in support of intellectual freedom. Her aim is to educate lawmakers about how librarians curate a collection.



Karla Hernandez-Mats, president of United Teachers of Dade, center, leads in chanting slogans against book banning as marchers arrive at Books and Books in hope of bringing awareness to Florida’s book banning, on Sunday, Oct. 1, 2023. (Carl Juste/Miami Herald/Tribune News Service via Getty Images)

“Much of the work that I’ve been doing is really behind the scenes,” she said.

Lisa Varga, Virginia Library Association director, is active in public meetings in her community of Virginia Beach.

“I just feel as though I’ve been doing my job, which is to speak up and speak out against this injustice,” she said.

She presented an invoice of \$7 million to the Virginia Beach School Board, saying the cost of reconsidering hundreds of books, via challenges filed by community members, would amount to that much staff time.

“Instead of simply saying, let’s have a conversation with the librarian about this book, you’re immediately jumping over their head and going into this process,” Varga said.

She also speaks at conferences to help other librarians prepare for and defend libraries against similar attempts to ban books.

Brooky Parks, who was fired, said groups who support their libraries should stand together.

“Librarians need to stand up, but if our community doesn’t stand up behind us, one person can’t make this change,” Parks said. “The entire community is going to have to come together with the librarians in order to stop this.”

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# World Cup Pride Houses offer safe space for LGBTQ fans: 'A lot to worry about'

By **Ann Killion**, Sports Columnist

May 31, 2026





A flag rests outside the SF LGBT Center in San Francisco on Thursday, Feb. 19, 2026.  
Benjamin Fanjoy/For the S.F. Chronicle



 Listen Now:

**World Cup Pride Houses offer safe space for LGBTQ fans: 'A lot to worry about'**

About 7 Minutes

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The upcoming World Cup is a challenge for soccer fans interested in coming to the United States. There are barriers everywhere: ticket gouging, lodging costs, travel obstacles.

And the fundamental issue of whether visitors will feel welcome and safe.

Pride House United 2026 is one effort to address that issue.

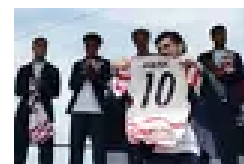
“We are taking an intentional stance to create the joy and the safe space that we can, and the community that we can control,” said Zac Brown, executive director of Pride House San Francisco. “We’re not going to control the way the federal government works. But we can make sure the people who have decided to be here have some joy.”

In recent months, several entities, including the ACLU and Amnesty International, have issued travel advisories for visitors coming to the United States for the World Cup. They warn that immigrants, racial minorities and “LBGTQ+ individuals have been and continue to be disproportionately targeted and affected by the administration’s policies and, as such, are most vulnerable to serious harm when traveling to and/or within the United States.”

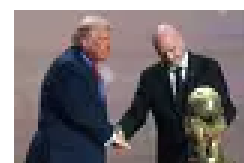
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## More For You

The U.S. World Cup roster reveal was supposed to be a big moment. It was a huge flop



Will President Trump be at U.S. men’s World Cup opener? Paraguayan officials say yes



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Pride Houses, which grew out of the historic Olympic model of hospitality houses, provide a welcoming space for LGBTQ+ fans, athletes and their allies during sporting events. Originating with the Olympic movement in Vancouver 2010, and expanded to other events, this will be the most extensive effort connected to a World Cup, with a presence in all 16 North American host cities.

The San Francisco Pride House is a particularly robust endeavor. Though the “San Francisco Bay Area” World Cup games will be taking place 44 miles south in Santa Clara, the local Pride House is at the SF LGBT Center at 1800 Market St.

“For the LGBTQ population, San Francisco is an iconic city that resonates with a lot of people for safety and inclusion,” said Danielle Thoe, a Pride House SF board member and co-owner of Rikki’s sports bar in the Castro. “So we’re pretty confident that if you are an LGBTQ person and you’re coming to a game in the Bay Area, you’re probably gonna find some time to come to San Francisco.”

FIFA has always been problematic for the queer community. Soccer’s governing body has been ineffective or uninterested in curtailing homophobic behavior of fans. It now makes a habit of awarding the prized men’s World Cup to countries openly hostile to gay rights: Russia in 2018, Qatar in 2022 and Saudi Arabia in 2034.

In today’s climate, that includes the United States.

“The United States is a real nightmare, in terms of queer travelers and ICE raids and racial profiling,” said Keph Senett, a trustee for Pride House International who lives in Canada. “We are having conversations with our partners in the States that are certainly unprecedented.”

The travel advisories warn of risks that include arrest, detention and deportation. They state: “For transgender and nonbinary persons traveling to the United States, recent memoranda and federal regulations suggest that travelers must apply for visas using sex assigned at birth.”

“There’s a lot to worry about,” Senett said. “Will I end up in detention? Will my social media be examined? Will my rights be respected? Will I be safe?”

It makes an effort like the Pride House more critical than ever.

“International football, or soccer, belongs to all the people,” Senett said. “People all over the world have a love for the beautiful game. That’s part of Pride House, saying we belong here and we are celebrating it. We’re part of sport. We exist. We aren’t erased. Our trans siblings are not erased.”

Each Pride House is locally organized. [The San Francisco Pride House](#) is already up and running and will have extensive programming throughout the World Cup, including all of Pride Month, which begins Monday. There has already been the first of a three-part speaker series, in conjunction with the Commonwealth Club, “Safe Play: Creating Inclusion in Sports.” A welcome party is scheduled for June 11, the first day of the World Cup. The next night will be the Big Gay Watch Party, at Beaux in the Castro, when the U.S. team opens against Paraguay in Los Angeles.

The first World Cup Pride House was a small effort in Rio in 2014. Russia, which had adopted strict “anti-gay propaganda” laws, made it clear Pride Houses were not welcome. Neither was it feasible in Qatar, where it is illegal to be gay (as it is in Saudi Arabia). Organizers knew that the 2026 World Cup presented an opportunity.

“Sports are a space that generally have not always been inclusive of the LGBTQ community as well as other marginalized groups,” said Thoe who, along with

Brown, is a member of the San Francisco Spikes soccer club. “The biggest tournament in the world has been hosted in spaces that are not welcoming or inclusive to LGBTQ folks. So it’s important that we as a community stand up and explicitly say, ‘No. Soccer is an inclusive place. You are welcome here.’”

In the current climate, safety is a concern, even in a welcoming city like San Francisco. Brown and Thoe said security concerns are being taken seriously. Thoe, who has been disturbed by seeing anti-trans stickers placed around the Castro, says they are ensuring that the space feels safe and inclusive in all ways.

This is a fraught moment for the queer community. But events like the World Cup provide an opportunity for visibility and connection.

“I’ve seen moments of regression for our community,” said Cyd Zeigler, the founder of Outsports and a board member of Pride House Los Angeles, tied to both the World Cup and the 2028 Olympics. “I have to keep reminding people in my community that this will pass. ... The push forward is not going to stop. You can’t stop us from sharing our stories and building compassion.”

Senett said, “I think the organization (of Pride Houses) is a real testament to the resilience of our community. I would not have blamed anyone for saying, it’s just too much right now. Instead people have pulled through with incredible initiatives.”

The many obstacles surrounding this World Cup seem to be having an impact on tourism. Current projections are trending below what was predicted.

“We’re not seeing the tourism hit we were expecting when this was initially planned,” Brown said. “A lot of things go into that, including that the draw the Bay Area received was not the most tourist friendly.”

But Brown is optimistic that the San Francisco Pride House will be successful.

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Thoe said, “In a time like this, it’s really important to give people that outlet to let their hair down and just be in community.

“With people they love. And the sport they love.”

May 31, 2026



**Ann Killion**

SPORTS COLUMNIST



Born in San Francisco and raised in Marin County, Ann Killion has covered Bay Area sports for more than a quarter of a century. An award-winning columnist and a veteran of 13 Olympics, several World Cups and the Tour de France, Ann joined The Chronicle in 2012. Ann has worked for the San Jose Mercury News, the Los Angeles Times and Sports Illustrated. She is a New York Times best-selling author, having co-written "Solo: A Memoir of Hope" with soccer star Hope Solo, "Throw Like A Girl" with softball player Jennie Finch and two middle-grade books on soccer, "Champions of Women's Soccer" and "Champions of Men's Soccer." She was named California Sportswriter of the Year in 2014, 2017 and 2018. She has two children and lives in Mill Valley.

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**Top Of The News**



## Stonington Education Association Comes Together to Get Pride Flags Back in Classrooms

Stonington teachers were troubled when they were asked to remove pride flags from their classrooms this fall. These symbols of inclusion had long served as a message to LGBTQ+ students that they were in a safe environment with a teacher they could trust.

Thanks to the strength of their local union, community connections, and a great relationship with the superintendent and board of education, teachers didn't have to wait long to get their flags back—and add on other wins. The Stonington Education Association also succeeded in getting a formal board resolution passed affirming support for LGBTQ+ students and staff and having nondiscrimination language added to teacher and other education staff contracts.



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*[Above, French teacher Leilani Laroco-Chance and Spanish teacher Jen Stefanowicz, the co-advisors to Stonington High's Alliance for Acceptance, pose with a reinstated pride flag.]*

The district initially asked that pride flags be removed after a parent raised concerns that the flags were in violation of a policy against displaying political materials in the classroom. While the district sought a legal opinion, it asked teachers to take down the flags, mostly small stickers on classroom walls or doors.

“Many of the small pride flags displayed in our classrooms were given to teachers by our LGBTQ+ student members of the Alliance for Acceptance, and they highlight the importance of supporting

all students within the community,” SEA President Michael Freeman said. The SEA maintained that pride flags are not partisan political speech but instead a symbol of acceptance and inclusion.

Distressed by the request to remove the flags, SEA focused its efforts on working toward a positive resolution. Representatives from the SEA requested a meeting with representatives of the Stonington Board of Education, the superintendent, and assistant superintendent and had what Freeman described as thoughtful, constructive dialogue.

It wasn’t just teachers who were bothered by the removal of the pride flags. At a special Board of Education meeting held to discuss the matter, more than 40 community members turned out, with 95% speaking in favor of restoring the flags to classrooms.

Attorney Thomas Mooney, the author of *A Practical Guide to Connecticut School Law*, gave his opinion to the board and superintendent, agreeing with the SEA that pride flags are not political speech. “The pride flag is not associated with a single political party, and its display should not be considered an expression of support for a political party,” Mooney wrote. “Rather, display of the pride flag can fairly be described as support for the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion.”

The superintendent subsequently recommended that the flags go back up, and the board unanimously agreed.

“As educators, we are committed to ensuring equity, diversity, and inclusion,” said Freeman. “We strive to make our classrooms a safe, welcoming learning environment for all of our students, and we must all support efforts to achieve inclusion in our schools. SEA and its members have a deep, long-standing commitment to our students and social rights, and we are dedicated to doing all we can to ensure that our schools are safe, caring environments that help all students reach their full potential.”

At the Board of Education meeting, Stonington graduate Breandan Cullen explained that flags are a sign to queer students that a teacher is safe to confide in.

“It was the only way, originally, that I found this community of people like me and felt supported,” Cullen said. “I’ve grown into the person that I am today because of a teacher who had a little pride flag on her desk that showed me it was safe to talk to her.”

The Board also adopted a resolution drafted by CEA UniServ Representative Chris Teifke declaring that the district is a safe space for students and that it prohibits discrimination and bullying “against all persons, whether student, family/caregiver of a student, or District employee, on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, or the actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression of their associates.”

The SEA used the ordeal to come together as a union and better support LGBTQ+ students and staff. The union organized a fundraiser selling pride flags, enabling more teachers to post pride flags in their classrooms, with the money going to support the high school’s gay-straight alliance.

“The SEA has always worked really closely with this Board of Education, and it was really helpful to have that working relationship to talk out what started as a controversial issue and turned into a positive development,” says Teifke. “Organizing and coming together around this issue have strengthened the association, and I look forward to seeing what they tackle next.”

Rather than waiting for issues to arise in your local association, Teifke recommends being proactive. “My hope is that no other local would have to go through something like this, but it was clear to me that because Stonington had already been proactive on these types of issues, that really helped when something like this turned up. They weren’t just reacting but continuing with the groundwork that had already been laid.”

To insulate against attacks, Teifke says to make sure there’s an active gay-straight alliance in your school district and that you have community support. He adds, “Looking back, I don’t think we needed to wait until an attack to get a nondiscrimination resolution passed by the Board of Education or get language in the contract. Being proactive is the right way to do things.”

Categories: CEA News, CEA Pride, CEAdaily, Pride Celebrations December 6, 2022

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