

Transgender teacher removed from classroom after some parents object to gender-neutral prefix ‘Mx.’

By [Lori Rozsa](#)

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A Florida school district this week transferred a fifth-grade teacher from working with children into a classroom with adults after the educator requested to be addressed with gender-neutral pronouns.

The teacher’s preferences — using the prefix Mx. and the pronouns “they, them, their instead of he, his, she, hers” — had been met with support from some Canopy Oaks Elementary parents and complaints from others, including “a handful” who pulled their children from the classroom, according to a district spokesman. The Leon County school district said teacher Chloe Bressack’s transfer was a mutual decision.

“Given the complexity of this issue, we both agreed a different environment would be best for Teacher Bressack’s educational career and for the young students at Canopy Oaks,” superintendent Rocky Hanna said in a statement.

Bressack has declined interviews about the situation at the Tallahassee school, but while attending a protest in support of transgender rights in February, the teacher spoke out about the difficulties of being a transgender educator.

“I had people look me in the eye and tell me that I am selfish for being a teacher, selfish for putting myself in a position where I am around children and exposing them to the transgender lifestyle, whatever that is,” Bressack told [the Famuan](#), a student publication of Florida A&M University. “I will not be spending my entire life pretending to be someone that I am not.”

Gina Duncan, director of transgender equality for the LGBTQ advocacy organization Equality Florida, said most school issues involving transgender rights involve students, but faculty and staff have difficulties, as well.

“What’s interesting about this is that the pushback is usually based on someone changing their identity, transforming from male to female, or female to male,” Duncan said. “But when you look at this situation, this person simply wants to be referred to in a certain way.”

Bressack was hired by Leon County Schools on Sept. 1. A week later, the teacher sent a letter home with students listing typical welcome letter information — experience, enthusiasm for the new year, favorite animal (giraffe), favorite candy (Sour Skittles).

The letter then included this paragraph:

“One thing you should know about me is that I use gender neutral terms,” Bressack wrote. “My prefix is Mx (pronounced Mix).”

Days later, a parent posted the letter on Facebook, and controversy erupted.

“I don’t think it’s up to teachers to make these decisions for kids. It’s not up to our teachers to teach these kinds of ideas (after all — a boy is a boy and a girl is a girl),” wrote Facebook poster Amanda Somerset, who said she knew Bressack and considered the educator to be “a great person.”

Bressack’s letter has garnered worldwide attention, including scorn from many right-wing groups. Some said they took issue with the grammatical use of the typically plural pronouns Bressack preferred. Others, including former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee, insisted it’s wrong to deviate from binary gender designations in schools.

A transgender teacher in New York said teachers should be addressed in the manner they prefer. But the teacher, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of difficulties she had after some parents learned she was transgender, said some schools hold transgender educators to different standards than others.

“Some teachers want to be called Mr., or Ms., or Mrs., or some teachers let students call them by their first name,” she said. “It’s the same as if a heterosexual teacher got married, and takes her husband’s name in the traditional style. If she asks her students to call her by her new name, nobody has a problem with that.”

With Bressack’s request, she said, the issue wasn’t about words.

“It’s about this teacher’s humanity, and accepting them for who they are,” she said. “Our preferences as trans people, that’s what they’re not accepting.”

In the welcome letter, Bressack, who taught math and science to approximately 110 elementary students, invited students and parents to talk to them or the administration if they had any questions.

“I know it takes some practice for it to feel natural, but in my experience students catch on pretty quickly,” Bressack wrote. “We’re not going for perfection, just making an effort!”

Chris Sands, secretary of the Tallahassee PFLAG group, which supports the LGBTQ community, said he understands why Bressack was moved if the issue was becoming a distraction to the school.

“It’s a tough line for the superintendent to walk,” Sands said. “We have an anti-discrimination policy in Leon County schools. It’s about the safety of the students.”

Sands said he believes the students didn’t have a problem adjusting to the gender-neutral pronouns Bressack requested.

“I think the reaction that’s happening is loud, vocal, irrational, and coming more from parents than students,” said Sands, who has children in Leon County’s elementary schools. “I think most kids accept it.”