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# Oregon Department of Education

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## Guidance to School Districts: Creating a Safe and Supportive School Environment for Transgender Students Issued May 5, 2016

ODE fosters excellence for every learner, and recognizes that academic success depends on a safe school environment. As an organization, we value equity for every student; this includes an educational environment safe and free from discrimination and harassment, ensuring that every student has equal access to educational programs and activities.

Under Oregon law, “[a] person may not be subjected to discrimination in any public elementary, secondary or community college education program or service, school or interschool activity or in any higher education program or service, school or interschool activity where the program, service, school or activity is financed in whole or in part by moneys appropriated by the Legislative Assembly.”<sup>1</sup> Discrimination includes “any act that unreasonably differentiates treatment, intended or unintended, or any act that is fair in form but discriminatory in operation, either of which is based on race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, marital status, age or disability.”<sup>2</sup> Oregon law broadly defines, “sexual orientation” as an individual’s actual or perceived heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality or gender identity, regardless of whether the individual’s gender identity, appearance, expression or behavior differs from that traditionally associated with the individual’s sex at birth.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, federal law under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX) generally prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in federally funded programs and activities.<sup>4</sup> The United States Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has issued guidance recognizing that Title IX protects transgender and gender nonconforming students.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice have stated that under Title IX, “discrimination based on a person’s gender identity, a person’s transgender status, or a person’s nonconformity to sex stereotypes constitutes discrimination based on sex” and has asserted a significant interest in ensuring that all students, including transgender students, have the opportunity to learn in an environment free of sex discrimination in public schools.<sup>6</sup> Recently, a federal court upheld this interpretation of federal law by the U.S. Department of Education.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ORS 659.850(2).

<sup>2</sup> ORS 659.850 (1).

<sup>3</sup> ORS 174.100.

<sup>4</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 1681(a) (2006).

<sup>5</sup> See 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681-1688 (2006); 34 C.F.R. Part 106 (2010); 54 C.F.R. Part 54 (2000); United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Questions and Answers on Title IX and Single-Sex Elementary and Secondary Classes and Extracurricular Activities (December 1, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> See Statement of Interest of the United States, *Grimm v. Gloucester County School Board*, Case No. 4:15cv54 (E.D. Virg. filed June 29, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> *Grimm v. Gloucester County School Board*, Case No. 15-2056 (Issued April 20, 2016).

## Student Identity

One's gender identity is an innate characteristic of each individual's personality that is generally declared by a child at an early age.<sup>9</sup> The person best situated to determine a student's gender identity is the individual student. In a case where a student is not yet able to self-advocate, the request to respect and affirm a student's identity will likely come from the student's parent.<sup>10</sup>

However, in other cases, transgender students may not want their parents to know about their transgender identity. These situations should be addressed on a case-by-case basis and school districts should balance the goal of supporting the student with the requirement that parents be kept informed about their children. The paramount consideration in such situations should be the health and safety of the student, while also making sure that the student's gender identity is affirmed in a manner that maintains privacy and confidentiality.

Students may openly discuss and express their gender identity and expression, and decide when, with whom, and how much information to share. District and school personnel may also encounter situations in which transgender students have not disclosed being a transgender student. School personnel should be mindful of the confidentiality and privacy rights of students when communicating with others and mindful not to reveal, imply, or refer to a student's gender identity or expression. To ensure confidentiality when discussing a particular concern such as academic progress, access to learning, conduct, discipline, grades, attendance, or health, the focus of school personnel should be specifically on the concern at issue and not on the student's gender identity or expression.

*EXAMPLE: The parents of a pre-school-age child who was assigned "female" at birth noted throughout the child's early years that their child identified as a boy. For as long as the parents could remember, the child preferred to play with boys rather than girls, wanted a short haircut, rejected wearing any clothing that the child identified as "something a girl would wear," and ignored anyone who called him by his stereotypically feminine name. When it was time for the child to enter kindergarten, the child said to his parents, "You have to tell them when I go to kindergarten that I'm a boy." The school district enrolled the child as a boy."*

It is recommended that school districts accept a student's assertion of his/her/their own gender identity. A student who says she is a girl and wishes to be regarded that way throughout the school day should be respected and treated like any other girl. So too with a student who says he is a boy and wishes to be affirmed that way throughout the school day. Such a student should be respected and treated like any other boy.

Many transgender people experience discrimination and some experience violence due to their identity. Some environments may feel safe and inclusive, and others less so, challenging a person's ability to live consistently with one gender identity in all aspects of life. For example, it is possible that a student assigned "male" at birth, with a female gender identity, who lives as a girl, is not able to express her female gender identity at all times.

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<sup>9</sup> *Gender Identity Development in Children*, American Academy of Pediatrics (updated 11/21/15).

<sup>10</sup> When used in this document, the term "parent" refers to a parent as well as legal guardian or person in parental relationship as defined in ORS 339.133.

The age at which individuals come to understand and express their gender identity may vary based on each person's social and familial supports.<sup>11</sup>

School districts should work closely with the student and the student's parents in devising an appropriate plan regarding the confidentiality of the student's transgender identity. In some cases, transgender students may feel more supported and safe if other students are aware that they are transgender. In these cases, school district staff should work closely with the student, parents, and other staff members on a plan to inform and educate the student's peers. It may also be appropriate for school districts to engage with community resources to assist with educational efforts.

Transgender and gender nonconforming students form a diverse community, and they may differ in how they present, including differences in comfort level with being out as transgender or gender nonconforming, their transition status, their age, and their gender expression. School districts should adopt a flexible approach given that transgender students may not feel comfortable or safe being their authentic selves in all contexts.

*EXAMPLE: In one school, a student explained to her guidance counselor that she was a transgender girl who had heretofore only been able to express her female gender identity while at home. The stress associated with having to hide her female gender identity by presenting as male at school was having a negative impact on her mental health, as well as on her academic performance. The student and her parents asked if it would be okay if she expressed her female gender identity at school. The guidance counselor acted on her request. The fact that the student presented no documentation to support her gender identity was not a concern. The school had no reason to believe the request was based on anything other than the student identified as female.*

### **Recommended Nondiscriminatory Practices**

#### **Provision of Free Appropriate Public Education**

Under Oregon law, school districts are required to provide a free appropriate public education to all students who are resident within the district.<sup>12</sup> Students "may not be subjected to discrimination in any public elementary, secondary or community college education program or service, school or interschool activity or in any higher education program or service, school or interschool activity where the program, service, school or activity is financed in whole or in part by moneys appropriated by the Legislative Assembly."<sup>13</sup> Discrimination includes "any act that unreasonably differentiates treatment, intended or unintended, or any act that is fair in form but discriminatory in operation, either of which is based on race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, marital status, age or disability."<sup>14</sup> "Sexual orientation means an individual's actual or perceived heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality or gender identity,

<sup>11</sup> See Gerald P. Mallon, "Practice with Transgendered Children," in Social Services with Transgendered Youth, 49, 55-58 (Gerald P. Mallon ed., 1999). See also Stephanie Brill & Rachel Pepper, "Developmental Stages and the Transgender Child," in The Transgender Child, 61-64.

<sup>12</sup> ORS 339.115.

<sup>13</sup> ORS 659.850(2).

<sup>14</sup> ORS 659.850.

regardless of whether the individual's gender identity, appearance, expression or behavior differs from that traditionally associated with the individual's sex at birth."<sup>15</sup>

### **Names and Pronouns**

Transgender students often choose to change the name assigned to them at birth to a name that affirms their gender identity. As with most other issues involved with creating a safe and supportive environment for transgender students, the best course is to engage the student, and possibly the parents, with respect to name and pronoun use. The school district should decide with the student and parents the best plan to reflect the individual student's needs when initiating name and pronoun use.

There are no state laws which either require or prescribe requirements for school district issued student IDs. However, if your school district has chosen to issue student IDs, it is recommended that student IDs be issued in the name reflecting the student's gender identity consistently asserted at school. This may require issuing the student a new ID card.

For those students who have been attending a school and undergo gender transition while attending the same school, school districts in consultation with the student and parents should develop a plan for initiating use of the chosen name and pronouns consistent with the student's gender identity.

*Example: A transgender girl was transferring to a new high school. She asked the principal to inform her teachers that even though her school records indicate that her name is John, she goes by the name Jane and uses female pronouns. With permission from Jane, the school principal sent the following memorandum to the student's classroom teachers: "The student John Smith wishes to be referred to by the name Jane Smith, a name that is consistent with the student's female gender identity. Please be certain to use the student's preferred name and female pronouns in all contexts. It is my expectation that students will similarly refer to the student by her appropriate name and pronouns. Your role modeling will help make a smooth transition for all concerned. Continued, repeated, and intentional misuse of names and pronouns may erode the educational environment for Jane. If you need any assistance to make sure that Jane Smith experiences a safe, nondiscriminatory classroom atmosphere, please contact me." In addition to the memorandum, school staff was provided with training about supports for transgender students as well as procedures for sexual harassment and bullying.*

### **Management of Student Identity in School Documents and Records**

School personnel should not disclose information that may reveal a student's transgender identity except as allowed under the Family Education Rights Privacy Act (FERPA). Under FERPA, generally only those school employees "determined to have legitimate educational interests" may have access to a student's records or the information contained within those records.<sup>16</sup> However, FERPA also contains other general exceptions for release of student records.<sup>17</sup> For example,

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<sup>15</sup> ORS 174.100.

<sup>16</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 99.31(a)(1).

<sup>17</sup> See the following web site for a discussion of the requirements of FERPA:  
<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>

student records may be released with the written permission of a student's parent. These rights transfer to the student when the student reaches the age of 18 or attends a school beyond the high school level.

Disclosing confidential student information to other employees, students, parents, or other third parties may violate privacy laws, including but not limited to FERPA. Disclosing confidential student medical information, for example transition status or hormone therapy, to other employees, students, parents or other third parties may constitute a violation of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) or Oregon law.<sup>18</sup>

Transgender students have the ability, as do all students, to discuss and express their gender identity and expression openly and decide when, with whom, and how much of their private information to share with others.

Schools should work closely with the student and parents in customizing an appropriate plan regarding the confidentiality of the student's transgender identity that supports the student. That plan may include the option to inform and educate the student's peers or to not share the information with the student's peers.

When a transgender student new to a school is using a preferred name, the birth name should be kept confidential by school district staff. School districts should review their Student Information Systems and ensure that all printed and digital materials generated for classroom and instructor use show the student's chosen name, not their legal name. Examples include attendance sheets, grade books, etc. School districts are reminded to use reasonable methods for ensuring that only those with a legitimate educational interest have access to student records.

ODE will change a student's gender within the Secure Student Identification System (SSID) upon request from a district. ODE will allow the request from the district to serve as the "documentation to support the change" that is generally required by ODE for changes to the SSID. There is no need for the student to prove their new gender. The student's declaration of their gender is acceptable.

Steps to change gender on the student record:

- › Update the student's gender in your student information system
- › Update the student's gender in SSID
- › Check your errors for any collections that do not catch the change

#### **First Name Change Options and Process:**

The administrative rules of the Secretary of State and State Board of Education require that student records contain at a minimum the full legal name of the student and other information.<sup>19</sup> Although ODE maintains a general expectation that the legal name in the school electronic record be consistent with the legal name of the student, in the case of transgender students it may be necessary to deviate from this policy to support and protect the student.

<sup>18</sup> ORS 179.505.

<sup>19</sup> OAR 166-400-0060(32) and 581-022-1670(7).

Additionally, transgender students often make the transition in stages and may not, yet, be ready to complete the legal name change process. In order to support students, ODE recommends that school districts enter the name the student is currently using (the name that corresponds to the student's self-identified gender) into the "Preferred name" field and retain the legal name in the school electronic record and generally in the student records. However, in some student information systems, the "preferred name" does not appear throughout the system and the legal name may appear in daily use documents like the gradebook, attendance records, etc. This can result in "outing" of the student as a student who is transgender.

In cases such as these, ODE will support the following options:

1. Replace the legal first name of the student in the electronic system with the student's preferred name and move the legal name to the middle name field. Monitor for SSID errors and resolve. Student should retain the same SSID and last name in the system.
2. Replace the legal first name of the student in the electronic system and make sure you monitor for SSID errors.
3. Have a cross-reference system in place to locate the student's electronic records by use of the student's legal name.
4. Retain the same SSID for the student in the electronic system.
5. Maintain the student's legal name generally within the student's record as required by Secretary of State administrative rules relating to the archiving of student records.

### **Graduation: Transcripts and Diplomas**

Students are often still in transition at the time of graduation and have not necessarily completed legal name changes and other documentation. Recommended best practice for graduating transgender students is to provide two diplomas and two sets of transcripts, one with the legal first name and one with the preferred first name.

Once a student has completed a legal name change, they can request all records be updated in their student education record to reflect their legally changed name. This may happen before or after graduation.

Although there are no state requirements relating to whether transcripts contain information about a student's gender, it is recommended that student transcripts be gender neutral and contain no indicator of gender for any student.

### **Student Health Records**

School nurses and other licensed health professionals need accurate and reliable information to ensure that the student receives appropriate care to enable them to coordinate care with other health care providers. A school nurse should use the transgender student's preferred name and identified gender except when necessary to ensure the health and safety of the student.



## **Instruction and Student Support (Comprehensive Sexuality Education)**

Under Oregon administrative rule, each school district shall provide an age-appropriate, comprehensive plan of instruction focusing on human sexuality education. Course material and instruction for all human sexuality education courses that discuss human sexuality in public elementary and secondary schools shall enhance students' understanding of sexuality as a normal and healthy aspect of human development. Local school boards shall approve the plan of instruction and require that it be reviewed and updated biennially in accordance with new scientific information and effective education strategies. The plan requires inclusive materials, language, and strategies that recognizes different sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expression. Further, sexuality education materials, instructional strategies, and activities must not, in any way, use shame or fear based tactics.<sup>20</sup>

The human sexuality education rule (OAR 581-022-1440) allows school districts to use instructional strategies, provide material, and engage in activities that promote a safe environment for all students to learn as well as healthy and positive peer relationships. Importantly, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) includes healthy sexuality and violence prevention instruction; it emphasizes dignity and respect for all; and validation for all individual and peer differences. Medically accurate, age appropriate, inclusive CSE is a tool to support student understanding of gender identity and sexual orientation diversity.

## **Gender-Based Activities, Rules, Policies, and Practices**

Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in federally funded education programs and activities. Regulations issued by the OCR authorize schools to offer single-sex classes or extracurricular activities only under certain circumstances. For these reasons, school districts should consult with their Title IX Coordinator or legal counsel to review such policies, rules and practices, and should eliminate any that do not serve a clear pedagogical purpose.

In 2014, OCR issued guidance relating to Title IX which stated that: "All students, including transgender students and students who do not conform to sex stereotypes, are protected from sex-based discrimination under Title IX. Under Title IX, a recipient generally must treat transgender students consistent with their gender identity in all aspects of the planning, implementation, enrollment, operation, and evaluation of single-sex classes."<sup>21</sup>

Based on this guidance transgender students should be treated consistent with their gender identity and should not be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to harassment or other forms of discrimination on the basis of gender identity in any program or activity. These activities and programs may include but are not limited to cheer class,

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<sup>20</sup> OAR 581-022-1440.

<sup>21</sup> *Questions and Answers on Title IX and Single-Sex Elementary and Secondary Classes and Extracurricular Activities*, United State Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, December 1, 2014 found at: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/faqs-title-ix-single-sex-201412.pdf>.

homecoming, prom, spirit day, celebrations, assemblies, acknowledgments, after school activities/ programs and all extra-curricular activities.

*EXAMPLE: One school district required female students to wear dresses to prom, and male students to wear suits or tuxedos. The school district changed its policy to remove gender specific requirements, and instead required students to wear formal attire.*

## Restroom and Locker Room Usage

School districts, as well as students and their families, may find the use of restrooms, locker rooms, changing facilities, and participation in extracurricular activities to be among the more important issues to consider. OCR has recognized that school districts “in preventing and redressing discrimination, ... must formulate, interpret and apply their rules in a manner that respects the legal rights of students, including constitutional rights relating to privacy.”<sup>22</sup> In 2015, the United States Departments of Education and Justice stated that:

Under Title IX, discrimination based on a person’s gender identity, a person’s transgender status, or a person’s nonconformity to sex stereotypes constitutes discrimination based on sex. As such, prohibiting a student from accessing the restrooms that matches his (her) gender identity is prohibited sex discrimination under Title IX. There is a public interest in ensuring that all students, including transgender students, have the opportunity to learn in an environment free of sex discrimination.<sup>23</sup>

Based on a recent OCR finding against an Illinois school district, it is recommended that alternative accommodations, such as a single “unisex” bathroom or private changing space, should be made available to students who request them, but should not be forced upon students, or presented as the only option.

OCR in a recent report issued to an Illinois school district found the district in violation of Title IX for excluding a high school student who is transgender “from participation in and denying her the benefits of its education program, providing services to her in a different manner, subjecting her to different rules of behavior, and subjecting her to different treatment on the basis of sex.”<sup>24</sup> The school district had honored the student’s request to be treated as female in all respects except for her request to be provided access to the girl’s locker rooms. The student used a restroom to change for PE class but did not take the most direct route from the restroom to the gymnasium “because it’s embarrassing. Everyone would see me.” She also took a circuitous route to PE class to avoid standing out. Her PE teacher reported that the student was frequently late to class. In another instance, the student did not receive information given to other students in the locker room by the PE teacher. The district installed ten private changing areas in the girl’s locker room

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<sup>22</sup> Investigation Report, United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights issued to Township High School District 211, Palantine Illinois, OCR Case No. 05-014-1055, page 12 (November 2, 2015).

<sup>23</sup> *Grimm v. Gloucester County School Board*, Case No. 4:15cv54 (E.D. Virg. filed June 29, 2015) statement of interest.

<sup>24</sup> Investigation Report, United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights issued to Township High School District 211, Palantine Illinois, OCR Case No. 05-014-1055 (November 2, 2015).

including five shower areas and five restroom stalls. The student also stated her intention was to change privately in one of the changing areas.

OCR stated “the District could satisfy its Title IX obligations as well as protect potential or actual student privacy interests.” OCR concluded “that the District, on the basis of sex, excluded [the student] from participation in and denied her the benefits of its education program, providing her different benefits or benefits in a different manner, subjected her to different rules of behavior, and subjected her to her to different treatment in violation of the Title IX regulation, at 34 C.F.R. section 106.31.”<sup>25</sup>

As cited previously in this document Oregon state law prohibits discrimination by public education providers based on an “individual’s actual or perceived heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality or gender identity, regardless of whether the individual’s gender identity, appearance, expression or behavior differs from that traditionally associated with the individual’s sex at birth.”<sup>26</sup> While we are unaware of any Oregon court cases which have interpreted this language, courts from other states have ruled on similar language from their own state laws and have found that this language provides protections for transgender students including the use of a bathroom consistent with the student’s gender identity.<sup>27</sup>

The following are examples of ways in which school officials have responded to situations involving gender-segregated activities or spaces:

*EXAMPLE: In one elementary school, a transgender student socially transitioned from female to male. After consultation with the student’s family and in accordance with the student’s wishes, the principal informed the staff that in order to foster an inclusive and supportive learning environment, the student will begin using male restrooms, in accordance with the student’s male gender identity and expression.*

*EXAMPLE: In one high school, a transgender student who had transitioned from male to female was given access to the female changing facility. However, the student was uncomfortable using the female changing facility with other female students, since there were no private changing areas within the facility. The principal examined the changing facility and determined that curtains could easily be put up along one side of a row of benches near the group lockers, providing private changing areas for any students who wished to use them. After the school put up the curtains, the student was comfortable using the changing facility.*

## **Sports and Physical Education**

Physical education is a required part of the curriculum and an important part of many students’ lives. Transgender students are to be provided the same opportunities to participate in physical education as are all other students. Generally, students should be permitted to participate in physical education and intramural sports in accordance with the student’s gender identity that is consistently asserted at school.

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<sup>25</sup> *Id.* at page 13.

<sup>26</sup> ORS 174.100.

<sup>27</sup> See *Doe v Regional School Unit*, 86A.3d 600 (2014).

Generally, transgender students should be permitted to also participate in interschool activities. Oregon law that prohibits discrimination in education also applies to interschool activities where the activity is financed in whole or in part by moneys appropriated by the Legislative Assembly.<sup>28</sup> School districts should also review guidance provided by the Oregon Student Athletic Association (OSAA) relating to participation in competitive high school inter-school athletic activities.

## Student Safety

Research has identified that transgender and gender nonconforming students are often targeted with physical violence and experience a hostile school environment at a higher rate than their peers. As a result, transgender and gender nonconforming students are also more likely to demonstrate frequent absenteeism, higher dropout rates, and higher rates of depression and suicide.<sup>29</sup>

Oregon law requires all school districts to “adopt a policy prohibiting harassment, intimidation or bullying and prohibiting cyberbullying.”<sup>30</sup> This policy must require school district employees to report acts of harassment, intimidation or bullying or an act of cyberbullying to a person identified by the district.<sup>31</sup> This includes harassment, intimidation or bullying against transgender students.

Under Oregon law, “harassment, intimidation or bullying” means any act that:

- (a) Substantially interferes with a student’s educational benefits, opportunities or performance;
- (b) Takes place on or immediately adjacent to school grounds, at any school-sponsored activity, on school-provided transportation or at any official school bus stop;
- (c) Has the effect of:
  - (A) Physically harming a student or damaging a student’s property;
  - (B) Knowingly placing a student in reasonable fear of physical harm to the student or damage to the student’s property; or
  - (C) Creating a hostile educational environment, including interfering with the psychological well-being of a student; and
- (d) May be based on, but not be limited to, the protected class status of a person.<sup>32</sup>

Oregon law goes on to define “protected class” as a group of persons distinguished, or perceived to be distinguished, by race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, marital status, familial status, source of income or disability.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> ORS 659.850(2).

<sup>29</sup> 18 Jaime M. Grant, et al., National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*, 3, 45 (2011).  
[http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/ntds\\_full.pdf](http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/ntds_full.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> ORS 339.356

<sup>31</sup> ORS 339.356

<sup>32</sup> ORS 339.351

<sup>33</sup> ORS 339.351

Required school district policies must include how the district will publicize the policy within the district including making it readily available to parents, school employees, students and others.<sup>34</sup> School district employees and parents should work together to resolve complaints alleging harassment, bullying or intimidation based on a student's actual or perceived gender identity or expression.

Based on school district policies, school administration should promptly respond to incidents of harassment, bullying or intimidation by taking actions that include, but are not limited to the following: a) intervening to stop the behavior; b) investigating and documenting the incident; c) determining and enforcing appropriate corrective actions within the school's area of responsibility; d) remedying the effects of such behavior on the targeted student and other students; and e) monitoring to ensure that the behavior does not recur.

In some instances, harassment, intimidation or bullying may constitute child abuse and require mandatory reporting by school district employees to law enforcement or the Department of Human Services and to a person designated by the school district.<sup>35</sup>

*EXAMPLE: During public testimony at a school board meeting a member of the public used the name of a student who is a transgender student and indicated they knew the grade level and school of the student. The person threatened bodily harm against the student if the student continued to attend school. The school district superintendent who was in attendance at the public meeting reported the information to local law enforcement and worked with local law enforcement and the student's parents to ensure the student's safety including not allowing the person access to school grounds.*

### Resources

American Academy of Pediatrics, *Gender Identity Development in Children*, (updated 11/21/15). <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/Pages/Gender-Identity-and-Gender-Confusion-In-Children.aspx>

Connecticut Safe Schools Coalition, *Guidelines for Connecticut Schools to Comply with Gender Identity and Expression Non-Discrimination Laws, Frequently Asked Questions* (2012).

[http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/equity/title\\_ix/guidelines\\_for\\_schools\\_on\\_gender\\_identity\\_and\\_expression2012oct4.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/equity/title_ix/guidelines_for_schools_on_gender_identity_and_expression2012oct4.pdf)

*Doe v Regional School Unit*, 86A.3d 600 (2014).

[http://www.courts.maine.gov/opinions\\_orders/supreme/lawcourt/2014/14me11do.pdf](http://www.courts.maine.gov/opinions_orders/supreme/lawcourt/2014/14me11do.pdf)

DOED reply to E. Prince, dated January, 2015.

[http://www.bricker.com/documents/misc/transgender\\_student\\_restroom\\_access\\_1-2015.pdf](http://www.bricker.com/documents/misc/transgender_student_restroom_access_1-2015.pdf)

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<sup>34</sup> ORS 339.356

<sup>35</sup> See ORS 339.370, 339.372 and 419B.005 to 419B.050.

Eugene School District (OR): *Best Practices for Serving Gender Nonconforming Students* (April 2015).

[http://www.4j.lane.edu/staff/4j\\_gendernonconformingstudents\\_bestpractices\\_january2016/](http://www.4j.lane.edu/staff/4j_gendernonconformingstudents_bestpractices_january2016/)

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

New York State Education Department, *Guidance to School Districts for Creating a Safe and Supportive School Environment For Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students* (2015).

OCR December 1, 2014 Q and A on Title IX and Single Sex Elementary and Secondary Classes.

OCR Dear Colleague Letter on Title IX Coordinators.

OCR Case No 09-12-1020 (July 24, 2013) Arcadia S.D. Resolution Letter and Agreement.

OCR Case No 09-12-1095 (October, 2014) Downey School District Resolution Letter and Agreement.

Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS).

Portland Public Schools (OR): *Supporting our transgender students* (August 2014).

[http://www.pps.k12.or.us/schools/grow/files/Board%20Ag%2010170\\_781\\_224\\_English.pdf](http://www.pps.k12.or.us/schools/grow/files/Board%20Ag%2010170_781_224_English.pdf)

*Price Waterhouse v Hopkins*, 490 US228, 251 (1989).

<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/490/228/case.html>

*Smith v City of Salem*, 378F.3d566, 574-75 (2004).

<http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-6th-circuit/1380020.html>

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681-1688.

[http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/tix\\_dis.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/tix_dis.html)

Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000c et seq.

<https://www2.ed.gov/.../civilrights>

**Questions or comments concerning these guidelines can be addressed to:**

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U.S. Department of Justice  
Civil Rights Division



U.S. Department of Education  
Office for Civil Rights

May 13, 2016

Dear Colleague:

Schools across the country strive to create and sustain inclusive, supportive, safe, and nondiscriminatory communities for all students. In recent years, we have received an increasing number of questions from parents, teachers, principals, and school superintendents about civil rights protections for transgender students. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX) and its implementing regulations prohibit sex discrimination in educational programs and activities operated by recipients of Federal financial assistance.<sup>1</sup> This prohibition encompasses discrimination based on a student's gender identity, including discrimination based on a student's transgender status. This letter summarizes a school's Title IX obligations regarding transgender students and explains how the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) evaluate a school's compliance with these obligations.

ED and DOJ (the Departments) have determined that this letter is *significant guidance*.<sup>2</sup> This guidance does not add requirements to applicable law, but provides information and examples to inform recipients about how the Departments evaluate whether covered entities are complying with their legal obligations. If you have questions or are interested in commenting on this guidance, please contact ED at [ocr@ed.gov](mailto:ocr@ed.gov) or 800-421-3481 (TDD 800-877-8339); or DOJ at [education@usdoj.gov](mailto:education@usdoj.gov) or 877-292-3804 (TTY: 800-514-0383).

Accompanying this letter is a separate document from ED's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, *Examples of Policies and Emerging Practices for Supporting Transgender Students*. The examples in that document are taken from policies that school districts, state education agencies, and high school athletics associations around the country have adopted to help ensure that transgender students enjoy a supportive and nondiscriminatory school environment. Schools are encouraged to consult that document for practical ways to meet Title IX's requirements.<sup>3</sup>

#### Terminology

- ☐ *Gender identity* refers to an individual's internal sense of gender. A person's gender identity may be different from or the same as the person's sex assigned at birth.
- ☐ *Sex assigned at birth* refers to the sex designation recorded on an infant's birth certificate should such a record be provided at birth.
- ☐ *Transgender* describes those individuals whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. A *transgender male* is someone who identifies as male but was assigned the sex of female at birth; a *transgender female* is someone who identifies as female but was assigned the sex of male at birth.



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**Dear Colleague Letter on Transgender Students**

**Notice of Language Assistance**

If you have difficulty understanding English, you may, free of charge, request language assistance services for this Department information by calling 1-800-USA-LEARN (1-800-872-5327) (TTY: 1-800-877-8339), or email us at: [Ed.Language.Assistance@ed.gov](mailto:Ed.Language.Assistance@ed.gov).

**Aviso a personas con dominio limitado del idioma inglés:** Si usted tiene alguna dificultad en entender el idioma inglés, puede, sin costo alguno, solicitar asistencia lingüística con respecto a esta información llamando al 1-800-USA-LEARN (1-800-872-5327) (TTY: 1-800-877-8339), o envíe un mensaje de correo electrónico a: [Ed.Language.Assistance@ed.gov](mailto:Ed.Language.Assistance@ed.gov).

**給英語能力有限人士的通知:** 如果您不懂英語, 或者使用英語有困難, 您可以要求獲得向大眾提供的語言協助服務, 幫助您理解教育部資訊。這些語言協助服務均可免費提供。如果您需要有關口譯或筆譯服務的詳細資訊, 請致電 1-800-USA-LEARN (1-800-872-5327) (聽語障人士專線: 1-800-877-8339), 或電郵: [Ed.Language.Assistance@ed.gov](mailto:Ed.Language.Assistance@ed.gov)。

**Thông báo dành cho những người có khả năng Anh ngữ hạn chế:** Nếu quý vị gặp khó khăn trong việc hiểu Anh ngữ thì quý vị có thể yêu cầu các dịch vụ hỗ trợ ngôn ngữ cho các tin tức của Bộ dành cho công chúng. Các dịch vụ hỗ trợ ngôn ngữ này đều miễn phí. Nếu quý vị muốn biết thêm chi tiết về các dịch vụ phiên dịch hay thông dịch, xin vui lòng gọi số 1-800-USA-LEARN (1-800-872-5327) (TTY: 1-800-877-8339), hoặc email: [Ed.Language.Assistance@ed.gov](mailto:Ed.Language.Assistance@ed.gov).

**영어 미숙자를 위한 공고:** 영어를 이해하는 데 어려움이 있으신 경우, 교육부 정보 센터에 일반인 대상 언어 지원 서비스를 요청하실 수 있습니다. 이러한 언어 지원 서비스는 무료로 제공됩니다. 통역이나 번역 서비스에 대해 자세한 정보가 필요하신 경우, 전화번호 1-800-USA-LEARN (1-800-872-5327) 또는 청각 장애인용 전화번호 1-800-877-8339 또는 이메일 주소 [Ed.Language.Assistance@ed.gov](mailto:Ed.Language.Assistance@ed.gov) 으로 연락하시기 바랍니다.

**Paunawa sa mga Taong Limitado ang Kaalaman sa English:** Kung nahihirapan kayong makaintindi ng English, maaari kayong humingi ng tulong ukol dito sa inpormasyon ng Kagawaran mula sa nagbibigay ng serbisyo na pagtulong kaugnay ng wika. Ang serbisyo na pagtulong kaugnay ng wika ay libre. Kung kailangan ninyo ng dagdag na impormasyon tungkol sa mga serbisyo kaugnay ng pagpapaliwanag o pagsasalin, mangyari lamang tumawag sa 1-800-USA-LEARN (1-800-872-5327) (TTY: 1-800-877-8339), o mag-email sa: [Ed.Language.Assistance@ed.gov](mailto:Ed.Language.Assistance@ed.gov).

**Уведомление для лиц с ограниченным знанием английского языка:** Если вы испытываете трудности в понимании английского языка, вы можете попросить, чтобы вам предоставили перевод информации, которую Министерство Образования доводит до всеобщего сведения. Этот перевод предоставляется бесплатно. Если вы хотите получить более подробную информацию об услугах устного и письменного перевода, звоните по телефону 1-800-USA-LEARN (1-800-872-5327) (служба для слабослышащих: 1-800-877-8339), или отправьте сообщение по адресу: [Ed.Language.Assistance@ed.gov](mailto:Ed.Language.Assistance@ed.gov).

- *Gender transition* refers to the process in which transgender individuals begin asserting the sex that corresponds to their gender identity instead of the sex they were assigned at birth. During gender transition, individuals begin to live and identify as the sex consistent with their gender identity and may dress differently, adopt a new name, and use pronouns consistent with their gender identity. Transgender individuals may undergo gender transition at any stage of their lives, and gender transition can happen swiftly or over a long duration of time.

### Compliance with Title IX

As a condition of receiving Federal funds, a school agrees that it will not exclude, separate, deny benefits to, or otherwise treat differently on the basis of sex any person in its educational programs or activities unless expressly authorized to do so under Title IX or its implementing regulations.<sup>4</sup> The Departments treat a student's gender identity as the student's sex for purposes of Title IX and its implementing regulations. This means that a school must not treat a transgender student differently from the way it treats other students of the same gender identity. The Departments' interpretation is consistent with courts' and other agencies' interpretations of Federal laws prohibiting sex discrimination.<sup>5</sup>

The Departments interpret Title IX to require that when a student or the student's parent or guardian, as appropriate, notifies the school administration that the student will assert a gender identity that differs from previous representations or records, the school will begin treating the student consistent with the student's gender identity. Under Title IX, there is no medical diagnosis or treatment requirement that students must meet as a prerequisite to being treated consistent with their gender identity.<sup>6</sup> Because transgender students often are unable to obtain identification documents that reflect their gender identity (e.g., due to restrictions imposed by state or local law in their place of birth or residence),<sup>7</sup> requiring students to produce such identification documents in order to treat them consistent with their gender identity may violate Title IX when doing so has the practical effect of limiting or denying students equal access to an educational program or activity.

A school's Title IX obligation to ensure nondiscrimination on the basis of sex requires schools to provide transgender students equal access to educational programs and activities even in circumstances in which other students, parents, or community members raise objections or concerns. As is consistently recognized in civil rights cases, the desire to accommodate others' discomfort cannot justify a policy that singles out and disadvantages a particular class of students.<sup>8</sup>

#### **1. Safe and Nondiscriminatory Environment**

Schools have a responsibility to provide a safe and nondiscriminatory environment for all students, including transgender students. Harassment that targets a student based on gender identity, transgender status, or gender transition is harassment based on sex, and the Departments enforce Title IX accordingly.<sup>9</sup> If sex-based harassment creates a hostile environment, the school must take prompt and effective steps to end the harassment, prevent its recurrence, and, as appropriate, remedy its effects. A school's failure to treat students consistent with their gender identity may create or contribute to a hostile environment in violation of Title IX. For a more detailed discussion of Title IX

requirements related to sex-based harassment, see guidance documents from ED's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) that are specific to this topic.<sup>10</sup>

## **2. Identification Documents, Names, and Pronouns**

Under Title IX, a school must treat students consistent with their gender identity even if their education records or identification documents indicate a different sex. The Departments have resolved Title IX investigations with agreements committing that school staff and contractors will use pronouns and names consistent with a transgender student's gender identity.<sup>11</sup>

## **3. Sex-Segregated Activities and Facilities**

Title IX's implementing regulations permit a school to provide sex-segregated restrooms, locker rooms, shower facilities, housing, and athletic teams, as well as single-sex classes under certain circumstances.<sup>12</sup> When a school provides sex-segregated activities and facilities, transgender students must be allowed to participate in such activities and access such facilities consistent with their gender identity.<sup>13</sup>

- ☐ **Restrooms and Locker Rooms.** A school may provide separate facilities on the basis of sex, but must allow transgender students access to such facilities consistent with their gender identity.<sup>14</sup> A school may not require transgender students to use facilities inconsistent with their gender identity or to use individual-user facilities when other students are not required to do so. A school may, however, make individual-user options available to all students who voluntarily seek additional privacy.<sup>15</sup>
- ☐ **Athletics.** Title IX regulations permit a school to operate or sponsor sex-segregated athletics teams when selection for such teams is based upon competitive skill or when the activity involved is a contact sport.<sup>16</sup> A school may not, however, adopt or adhere to requirements that rely on overly broad generalizations or stereotypes about the differences between transgender students and other students of the same sex (*i.e.*, the same gender identity) or others' discomfort with transgender students.<sup>17</sup> Title IX does not prohibit age-appropriate, tailored requirements based on sound, current, and research-based medical knowledge about the impact of the students' participation on the competitive fairness or physical safety of the sport.<sup>18</sup>
- ☐ **Single-Sex Classes.** Although separating students by sex in classes and activities is generally prohibited, nonvocational elementary and secondary schools may offer nonvocational single-sex classes and extracurricular activities under certain circumstances.<sup>19</sup> When offering such classes and activities, a school must allow transgender students to participate consistent with their gender identity.
- ☐ **Single-Sex Schools.** Title IX does not apply to the admissions policies of certain educational institutions, including nonvocational elementary and secondary schools, and private undergraduate colleges.<sup>20</sup> Those schools are therefore permitted under Title IX to set their own

sex-based admissions policies. Nothing in Title IX prohibits a private undergraduate women's college from admitting transgender women if it so chooses.

- ☐ **Social Fraternities and Sororities.** Title IX does not apply to the membership practices of social fraternities and sororities.<sup>21</sup> Those organizations are therefore permitted under Title IX to set their own policies regarding the sex, including gender identity, of their members. Nothing in Title IX prohibits a fraternity from admitting transgender men or a sorority from admitting transgender women if it so chooses.
- ☐ **Housing and Overnight Accommodations.** Title IX allows a school to provide separate housing on the basis of sex.<sup>22</sup> But a school must allow transgender students to access housing consistent with their gender identity and may not require transgender students to stay in single-occupancy accommodations or to disclose personal information when not required of other students. Nothing in Title IX prohibits a school from honoring a student's voluntary request for single-occupancy accommodations if it so chooses.<sup>23</sup>
- ☐ **Other Sex-Specific Activities and Rules.** Unless expressly authorized by Title IX or its implementing regulations, a school may not segregate or otherwise distinguish students on the basis of their sex, including gender identity, in any school activities or the application of any school rule. Likewise, a school may not discipline students or exclude them from participating in activities for appearing or behaving in a manner that is consistent with their gender identity or that does not conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity or femininity (e.g., in yearbook photographs, at school dances, or at graduation ceremonies).<sup>24</sup>

#### **4. Privacy and Education Records**

Protecting transgender students' privacy is critical to ensuring they are treated consistent with their gender identity. The Departments may find a Title IX violation when a school limits students' educational rights or opportunities by failing to take reasonable steps to protect students' privacy related to their transgender status, including their birth name or sex assigned at birth.<sup>25</sup> Nonconsensual disclosure of personally identifiable information (PII), such as a student's birth name or sex assigned at birth, could be harmful to or invade the privacy of transgender students and may also violate the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).<sup>26</sup> A school may maintain records with this information, but such records should be kept confidential.

- ☐ **Disclosure of Personally Identifiable Information from Education Records.** FERPA generally prevents the nonconsensual disclosure of PII from a student's education records; one exception is that records may be disclosed to individual school personnel who have been determined to have a legitimate educational interest in the information.<sup>27</sup> Even when a student has disclosed the student's transgender status to some members of the school community, schools may not rely on this FERPA exception to disclose PII from education records to other school personnel who do not have a legitimate educational interest in the information. Inappropriately disclosing (or requiring students or their parents to disclose) PII from education records to the school community may

violate FERPA and interfere with transgender students' right under Title IX to be treated consistent with their gender identity.

- **Disclosure of Directory Information.** Under FERPA's implementing regulations, a school may disclose appropriately designated directory information from a student's education record if disclosure would not generally be considered harmful or an invasion of privacy.<sup>28</sup> Directory information may include a student's name, address, telephone number, date and place of birth, honors and awards, and dates of attendance.<sup>29</sup> School officials may not designate students' sex, including transgender status, as directory information because doing so could be harmful or an invasion of privacy.<sup>30</sup> A school also must allow eligible students (*i.e.*, students who have reached 18 years of age or are attending a postsecondary institution) or parents, as appropriate, a reasonable amount of time to request that the school not disclose a student's directory information.<sup>31</sup>
- **Amendment or Correction of Education Records.** A school may receive requests to correct a student's education records to make them consistent with the student's gender identity. Updating a transgender student's education records to reflect the student's gender identity and new name will help protect privacy and ensure personnel consistently use appropriate names and pronouns.
  - Under FERPA, a school must consider the request of an eligible student or parent to amend information in the student's education records that is inaccurate, misleading, or in violation of the student's privacy rights.<sup>32</sup> If the school does not amend the record, it must inform the requestor of its decision and of the right to a hearing. If, after the hearing, the school does not amend the record, it must inform the requestor of the right to insert a statement in the record with the requestor's comments on the contested information, a statement that the requestor disagrees with the hearing decision, or both. That statement must be disclosed whenever the record to which the statement relates is disclosed.<sup>33</sup>
  - Under Title IX, a school must respond to a request to amend information related to a student's transgender status consistent with its general practices for amending other students' records.<sup>34</sup> If a student or parent complains about the school's handling of such a request, the school must promptly and equitably resolve the complaint under the school's Title IX grievance procedures.<sup>35</sup>

\* \* \*

We appreciate the work that many schools, state agencies, and other organizations have undertaken to make educational programs and activities welcoming, safe, and inclusive for all students.

Sincerely,

/s/

Catherine E. Lhamon  
Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
U.S. Department of Education

/s/

Vanita Gupta  
Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights  
U.S. Department of Justice

<sup>1</sup> 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681–1688; 34 C.F.R. Pt. 106; 28 C.F.R. Pt. 54. In this letter, the term *schools* refers to recipients of Federal financial assistance at all educational levels, including school districts, colleges, and universities. An educational institution that is controlled by a religious organization is exempt from Title IX to the extent that compliance would not be consistent with the religious tenets of such organization. 20 U.S.C. § 1681(a)(3); 34 C.F.R. § 106.12(a).

<sup>2</sup> Office of Management and Budget, Final Bulletin for Agency Good Guidance Practices, 72 Fed. Reg. 3432 (Jan. 25, 2007), <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2007-01-25/pdf/2007-01-25.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> ED, *Examples of Policies and Emerging Practices for Supporting Transgender Students* (May 13, 2016), <https://www.ed.gov/olivet/2016/05/13/examples-of-policies-and-emerging-practices-for-supporting-transgender-students>. OCR also posts many of its resolution agreements in cases involving transgender students online at <https://www.ocr-education.gov/>. While these agreements address fact-specific cases, and therefore do not state general policy, they identify examples of ways OCR and recipients have resolved some issues addressed in this guidance.

<sup>4</sup> 34 C.F.R. §§ 106.4, 106.31(a). For simplicity, this letter cites only to ED's Title IX regulations. DOJ has also promulgated Title IX regulations. See 28 C.F.R. Pt. 54. For purposes of how the Title IX regulations at issue in this guidance apply to transgender individuals, DOJ interprets its regulations similarly to ED. State and local rules cannot limit or override the requirements of Federal laws. See 34 C.F.R. § 106.6(b).

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., *Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins*, 490 U.S. 228 (1989); *Oncale v. Sundowner Offshore Servs. Inc.*, 523 U.S. 75, 79 (1998); *G.G. v. Gloucester Cnty. Sch. Bd.*, No. 15-2056, 2016 WL 1567467, at \*8 (4th Cir. Apr. 19, 2016); *Glenn v. Brumby*, 663 F.3d 1312, 1317 (11th Cir. 2011); *Smith v. City of Salem*, 378 F.3d 566, 572-75 (6th Cir. 2004); *Rosa v. Park W. Bank & Trust Co.*, 214 F.3d 213, 215-16 (1st Cir. 2000); *Schwenk v. Hartford*, 204 F.3d 1187, 1201-02 (9th Cir. 2000); *Schroer v. Billington*, 577 F. Supp. 2d 293, 306-08 (D.D.C. 2008); *Macy v. Dep't of Justice*, Appeal No. 012012082 (U.S. Equal Emp't Opportunity Comm'n Apr. 20, 2012). See also U.S. Dep't of Labor (USDOL), Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 37-14, *Update on Complying with Nondiscrimination Requirements: Discrimination Based on Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Stereotyping are Prohibited Forms of Sex Discrimination in the Workforce Development System* (2015), <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/asset/document/37-14.pdf>; USDOL, Job Corps, Directive: Job Corps Program Instruction Notice No. 14-31, *Ensuring Equal Access for Transgender Applicants and Students to the Job Corps Program* (May 1, 2015), <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/asset/document/14-31.pdf>; DOJ, Memorandum from the Attorney General, *Treatment of Transgender Employment Discrimination Claims Under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964* (2014), <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/asset/document/14-02.pdf>; USDOL, Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, Directive 2014-02, *Gender Identity and Sex Discrimination* (2014), <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/asset/document/14-02.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> See *Lusardi v. Dep't of the Army*, Appeal No. 0120133395 at 9 (U.S. Equal Emp't Opportunity Comm'n Apr. 1, 2015) ("An agency may not condition access to facilities—or to other terms, conditions, or privileges of employment—on the completion of certain medical steps that the agency itself has unilaterally determined will somehow prove the bona fides of the individual's gender identity.").

<sup>7</sup> See *G.G.*, 2016 WL 1567467, at \*1 n.1 (noting that medical authorities "do not permit sex reassignment surgery for persons who are under the legal age of majority").

<sup>8</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 106.31(b)(4); see *G.G.*, 2016 WL 1567467, at \*8 & n.10 (affirming that individuals have legitimate and important privacy interests and noting that these interests do not inherently conflict with nondiscrimination principles); *Cruzan v. Special Sch. Dist. No. 1*, 294 F.3d 981, 984 (8th Cir. 2002) (rejecting claim that allowing a transgender woman "merely [to be] present in the women's faculty restroom" created a hostile environment); *Glenn*, 663 F.3d at 1321 (defendant's proffered justification that "other women might object to [the plaintiff's] restroom use" was "wholly irrelevant"). See also *Palmore v. Sidoti*, 466 U.S. 429, 433 (1984) ("Private biases may be outside the reach of the law, but the law cannot, directly or indirectly, give them effect."); *City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Ctr.*, 473 U.S. 432, 448 (1985) (recognizing that "mere negative attitudes, or fear . . . are not permissible bases for" government action).

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Resolution Agreement, *In re Downey Unified Sch. Dist., CA*, OCR Case No. 09-12-1095, (Oct. 8, 2014), [https://www.ocr-education.org/sites/default/files/Downey%20Unified%20Sch.%20Dist.%20CA%2009-12-1095.pdf](#) (agreement to address harassment of transgender student, including allegations that peers continued to call her by her former name, shared pictures of her prior to her transition, and frequently asked questions about her anatomy and sexuality); Consent Decree, *Doe v. Anoka-Hennepin Sch. Dist. No. 11, MN* (D. Minn. Mar. 1, 2012), [https://www.ocr-education.org/sites/default/files/Anoka-Hennepin%20Sch.%20Dist.%20MN%2012-03-01.pdf](#).

(consent decree to address sex-based harassment, including based on nonconformity with gender stereotypes); Resolution Agreement, *In re Tehachapi Unified Sch. Dist., CA*, OCR Case No. 09-11-1031 (June 30, 2011), [https://www.ocr-education.org/sites/default/files/Tehachapi%20Unified%20Sch.%20Dist.%20CA%2009-11-1031.pdf](#) (agreement to address sexual and gender-based harassment, including harassment based on nonconformity with gender stereotypes). See also *Lusardi*, Appeal No. 0120133395, at \*15 (“Persistent failure to use the employee’s correct name and pronoun may constitute unlawful, sex-based harassment if such conduct is either severe or pervasive enough to create a hostile work environment”).

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., OCR, *Revised Sexual Harassment Guidance: Harassment of Students by School Employees, Other Students, or Third Parties* (2001), [https://www.ocr-education.org/sites/default/files/Revised%20Sexual%20Harassment%20Guidance.pdf](#); OCR, *Dear Colleague Letter: Harassment and Bullying* (Oct. 26, 2010), [https://www.ocr-education.org/sites/default/files/2010-10-26-DCL-Harassment%20and%20Bullying.pdf](#); OCR, *Dear Colleague Letter: Sexual Violence* (Apr. 4, 2011), [https://www.ocr-education.org/sites/default/files/2011-04-04-DCL-Sexual%20Violence.pdf](#); OCR, *Questions and Answers on Title IX and Sexual Violence* (Apr. 29, 2014), [https://www.ocr-education.org/sites/default/files/2014-04-29-DCL-Title%20IX%20and%20Sexual%20Violence.pdf](#).

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Resolution Agreement, *In re Cent. Piedmont Cmty. Coll., NC*, OCR Case No. 11-14-2265 (Aug. 13, 2015), [https://www.ocr-education.org/sites/default/files/Cent.%20Piedmont%20Cmty.%20Coll.%20NC%2011-14-2265.pdf](#) (agreement to use a transgender student’s preferred name and gender and change the student’s official record to reflect a name change).

<sup>12</sup> 34 C.F.R. §§ 106.32, 106.33, 106.34, 106.41(b).

<sup>13</sup> See 34 C.F.R. § 106.31.

<sup>14</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 106.33.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Resolution Agreement, *In re Township High Sch. Dist. 211, IL*, OCR Case No. 05-14-1055 (Dec. 2, 2015), [https://www.ocr-education.org/sites/default/files/Township%20High%20Sch.%20Dist.%20211%20IL%2005-14-1055.pdf](#) (agreement to provide any student who requests additional privacy “access to a reasonable alternative, such as assignment of a student locker in near proximity to the office of a teacher or coach; use of another private area (such as a restroom stall) within the public area; use of a nearby private area (such as a single-use facility); or a separate schedule of use.”).

<sup>16</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 106.41(b). Nothing in Title IX prohibits schools from offering coeducational athletic opportunities.

<sup>17</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 106.6(b), (c). An interscholastic athletic association is subject to Title IX if (1) the association receives Federal financial assistance or (2) its members are recipients of Federal financial assistance and have ceded controlling authority over portions of their athletic program to the association. Where an athletic association is covered by Title IX, a school’s obligations regarding transgender athletes apply with equal force to the association.

<sup>18</sup> The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), for example, reported that in developing its policy for participation by transgender students in college athletics, it consulted with medical experts, athletics officials, affected students, and a consensus report entitled *On the Team: Equal Opportunity for Transgender Student Athletes* (2010) by Dr. Pat Griffin & Helen J. Carroll (*On the Team*), [https://www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/NCLR\\_TransStudentAthlete%20%2010.pdf](#). See NCAA Office of Inclusion, *NCAA Inclusion of Transgender Student-Athletes 2*, 30-31 (2011), [https://www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/Transgender\\_Handbook\\_2011\\_Final.pdf](#) (citing *On the Team*). The *On the Team* report noted that policies that may be appropriate at the college level may “be unfair and too complicated for [the high school] level of competition.” *On the Team* at 26. After engaging in similar processes, some state interscholastic athletics associations have adopted policies for participation by transgender students in high school athletics that they determined were age-appropriate.

<sup>19</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 106.34(a), (b). Schools may also separate students by sex in physical education classes during participation in contact sports. *Id.* § 106.34(a)(1).

<sup>20</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 1681(a)(1); 34 C.F.R. § 106.15(d); 34 C.F.R. § 106.34(c) (a recipient may offer a single-sex public nonvocational elementary and secondary school so long as it provides students of the excluded sex a “substantially



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equal single-sex school or coeducational school”).

<sup>21</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 1681(a)(6)(A); 34 C.F.R. § 106.14(a).

<sup>22</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 1686; 34 C.F.R. § 106.32.

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., Resolution Agreement, *In re Arcadia Unified Sch. Dist., CA*, OCR Case No. 09-12-1020, DOJ Case No. 169-12C-70, (July 24, 2013), <http://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2013/07/07/09-12-1020%20Resolution%20Agreement.pdf> (agreement to provide access to single-sex overnight events consistent with students’ gender identity, but allowing students to request access to private facilities).

<sup>24</sup> See 34 C.F.R. §§ 106.31(a), 106.31(b)(4). See also, *In re Downey Unified Sch. Dist., CA*, *supra* n. 9; *In re Cent. Piedmont Cmty. Coll., NC*, *supra* n. 11.

<sup>25</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 106.31(b)(7).

<sup>26</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 C.F.R. Part 99. FERPA is administered by ED’s Family Policy Compliance Office (FPCO). Additional information about FERPA and FPCO is available at [www.fpc.ed.gov](http://www.fpc.ed.gov).

<sup>27</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 1232g(b)(1)(A); 34 C.F.R. § 99.31(a)(1).

<sup>28</sup> 34 C.F.R. §§ 99.3, 99.31(a)(11), 99.37.

<sup>29</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 1232g(a)(5)(A); 34 C.F.R. § 99.3.

<sup>30</sup> Letter from FPCO to Institutions of Postsecondary Education 3 (Sept. 2009).

<sup>31</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 1232g(a)(5)(3); 34 C.F.R. §§ 99.3, 99.37(a)(3).

<sup>32</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 99.20.

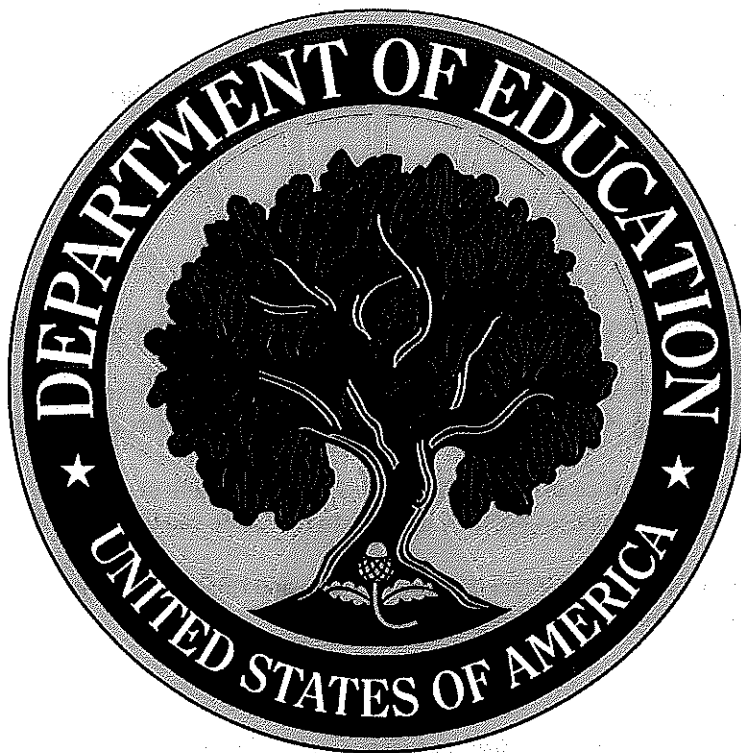
<sup>33</sup> 34 C.F.R. §§ 99.20-99.22.

<sup>34</sup> See 34 C.F.R. § 106.31(b)(4).

<sup>35</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 106.8(b).



# Examples of Policies and Emerging Practices for Supporting Transgender Students



U.S. Department of Education

Office of Elementary and Secondary Education

Office of Safe and Healthy Students

May 2016

U.S. Department of Education  
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education  
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## Examples of Policies and Emerging Practices for Supporting Transgender Students

The U.S. Department of Education (“ED”) is committed to providing schools with the information they need to provide a safe, supportive, and nondiscriminatory learning environment for all students. It has come to ED’s attention that many transgender students (*i.e.*, students whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth) report feeling unsafe and experiencing verbal and physical harassment or assault in school, and that these students may perform worse academically when they are harassed. School administrators, educators, students, and parents are asking questions about how to support transgender students and have requested clarity from ED. In response, ED developed two documents:

- ED’s Office for Civil Rights and the U.S. Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division jointly issued a Dear Colleague Letter (“DCL”) about transgender students’ rights and schools’ legal obligations under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972.<sup>1</sup> Any school that has questions related to transgender students or wants to be prepared to address such issues if they arise should review the DCL.
- ED’s Office of Elementary and Secondary Education compiled the attached examples of policies<sup>2</sup> and emerging practices<sup>3</sup> that some schools are already using to support transgender students. We share some common questions on topics such as school records, privacy, and terminology, and then explain how some state and school district policies have answered these questions. We present this information to illustrate how states and school districts are supporting transgender students. We also provide information about and links to those policies at the end of the document, along with other resources that may be helpful as educators develop policies and practices for their own schools.

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<sup>1</sup> 20 U.S.C. §§ 1681-1688; Dear Colleague Letter: Transgender Students (May 13, 2016), [www.ed.gov/ocr/letters/colleague-201605-title-ix-transgender.pdf](http://www.ed.gov/ocr/letters/colleague-201605-title-ix-transgender.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> In this document, the term *policy* or *policies* refers generally to policies, guidance, guidelines, procedures, regulations, and resource guides issued by schools, school districts, and state educational agencies.

<sup>3</sup> ED considers *emerging practices* to be operational activities or initiatives that contribute to successful outcomes or enhance agency performance capabilities. Emerging practices are those that have been successfully implemented and demonstrate the potential for replication by other agencies. Emerging practices typically have not been rigorously evaluated, but still offer ideas that work in specific situations.

Each person is unique, so the needs of individual transgender students vary. But a school policy setting forth general principles for supporting transgender students can help set clear expectations for students and staff and avoid unnecessary confusion, invasions of privacy, and other harms. The education community continues to develop and revise policies and practices to address the rights of transgender students and reflect our evolving understanding and the individualized nature of transgender students' needs.

This document contains information from some schools, school districts, and state and federal agencies. Inclusion of this information does not constitute an endorsement by ED of any policy or practice, educational product, service, curriculum or pedagogy. In addition, this document references websites that provide information created and maintained by other entities. These references are for the reader's convenience. ED does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of this outside information. This document does not constitute legal advice, create legal obligations, or impose new requirements.

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## Student Transitions

### **1. How do schools find out that a student will transition?**

Typically, the student or the student's parent or guardian will tell the school and ask that the school start treating the student in a manner consistent with the student's gender identity. Some students transition over a school break, such as summer break. Other students may undergo a gender transition during the school year, and may ask (or their parents may ask on their behalf) teachers and other school employees to respect their identity as they begin expressing their gender identity, which may include changes to their dress and appearance. Some school district or state policies address how a student or parent might provide the relevant notice to the school.

- Alaska's Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District issued guidelines ("Mat-Su Borough Guidelines") advising that transgender students or their parents or guardians should contact the building administrator or the student's guidance counselor to schedule a meeting to develop a plan to address the student's particular circumstances and needs.
- The guidelines issued by Washington's Superintendent of Public Instruction ("Washington State Guidelines") offer an example of a student who first attended school as a boy and, about midway through a school year, she and her family decided that she would transition and begin presenting as a girl. She prefers to dress in stereotypically feminine attire such as dresses and skirts. Although she is growing her hair out and consistently presents as female at school, her hair is still in a rather short, typically boyish haircut. The student, her parents, and school administrators asked her friends and teachers to use female pronouns to address her.

### **2. How do schools confirm a student's gender identity?**

Schools generally rely on students' (or in the case of younger students, their parents' or guardians') expression of their gender identity. Although schools sometimes request some form of confirmation, they generally accept the student's asserted gender identity. Some schools offer additional guidance on this issue.

- Los Angeles Unified School District issued a policy ("LAUSD Policy") noting that "[t]here is no medical or mental health diagnosis or treatment threshold that

students must meet in order to have their gender identity recognized and respected” and that evidence may include an expressed desire to be consistently recognized by their gender identity.

- The New York State Education Department issued guidance (“NYSED Guidance”) recommending that “schools accept a student’s assertion of his/her/their own gender identity” and provides examples of ways to confirm the assertion, such as a statement from the student or a letter from an adult familiar with the student’s situation. The same guidance also offers the following example: “In one middle school, a student explained to her guidance counselor that she was a transgender girl who had heretofore only been able to express her female gender identity while at home. The stress associated with having to hide her female gender identity by presenting as male at school was having a negative impact on her mental health, as well as on her academic performance. The student and her parents asked if it would be okay if she expressed her female gender identity at school. The guidance counselor responded favorably to the request. The fact that the student presented no documentation to support her gender identity was not a concern since the school had no reason to believe the request was based on anything other than a sincerely held belief that she had a female gender identity.”
- Alaska’s Anchorage School District developed administrative guidelines (“Anchorage Administrative Guidelines”) noting that being transgender “involves more than a casual declaration of gender identity or expression but does not require proof of a formal evaluation and diagnosis. Since individual circumstances, needs, programs, facilities and resources may differ; administrators and school staff are expected to consider the needs of the individual on a case-by-case basis.”

### **3. How do schools communicate with the parents of younger students compared to older transgender students?**

Parents are often the first to initiate a conversation with the school when their child is transgender, particularly when younger children are involved. Parents may play less of a role in an older student’s transition. Some school policies recommend, with regard to an older student, that school staff consult with the student before reaching out to the student’s parents.

- The District of Columbia Public Schools issued guidance (“DCPS Guidance”) noting that “students may choose to have their parents participate in the transition process, but parental participation is not required.” The guidance further

recommends different developmentally appropriate protocols depending on grade level. The DCPS Guidance suggests that the school work with a young student's family to identify appropriate steps to support the student, but recommends working closely with older students prior to notification of family. The guidance also provides a model planning document with key issues to discuss with the student or the student's family.

- Similarly, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education issued guidance ("Massachusetts Guidance") that notes: "Some transgender and gender nonconforming students are not openly so at home for reasons such as safety concerns or lack of acceptance. School personnel should speak with the student first before discussing a student's gender nonconformity or transgender status with the student's parent or guardian. For the same reasons, school personnel should discuss with the student how the school should refer to the student, *e.g.*, appropriate pronoun use, in written communication to the student's parent or guardian."
- Chicago Public Schools' guidelines ("Chicago Guidelines") provide: "When speaking with other staff members, parents, guardians, or third parties, school staff should not disclose a student's preferred name, pronoun, or other confidential information pertaining to the student's transgender or gender nonconforming status without the student's permission, unless authorized to do so by the Law Department."
- Oregon's Department of Education issued guidance stating, "In a case where a student is not yet able to self-advocate, the request to respect and affirm a student's identity will likely come from the student's parent. However, in other cases, transgender students may not want their parents to know about their transgender identity. These situations should be addressed on a case-by-case basis and school districts should balance the goal of supporting the student with the requirement that parents be kept informed about their children. The paramount consideration in such situations should be the health and safety of the student, while also making sure that the student's gender identity is affirmed in a manner that maintains privacy and confidentiality."

## Privacy, Confidentiality, and Student Records

### **4. How do schools protect a transgender student's privacy regarding the student's transgender status?**

There are a number of ways schools protect transgender students' interests in keeping their transgender status private, including taking steps to prepare staff to consistently use the appropriate name and pronouns. Using transgender students' birth names or pronouns that do not match their gender identity risks disclosing a student's transgender status. Some state and school district policies also address how federal and state privacy laws apply to transgender students and how to keep information about a student's transgender status confidential.

- California's El Rancho Unified School District issued a regulation ("El Rancho Regulation") that provides that students have the right to openly discuss and express their gender identity, but also reminds school personnel to be "mindful of the confidentiality and privacy rights of [transgender] students when contacting parents/legal guardians so as not to reveal, imply, or refer to a student's actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression."
- The Chicago Guidelines provide that the school should convene an administrative support team to work with transgender students and/or their parents or guardians to address each student's individual needs and supports. To protect the student's privacy, this team is limited to "the school principal, the student, individuals the student identifies as trusted adults, and individuals the principal determines may have a legitimate interest in the safety and healthy development of the student."
- The Mat-Su Borough Guidelines state: "In some cases, a student may want school staff and students to know, and in other cases the student may not want this information to be widely known. School staff should take care to follow the student's plan and not to inadvertently disclose information that is intended to be kept private or that is protected from disclosure (such as confidential medical information)."
- The Massachusetts Guidance advises schools "to collect or maintain information about students' gender only when necessary" and offers an example: "One school reviewed the documentation requests it sent out to families and noticed that field trip permission forms included a line to fill in indicating the student's gender. Upon consideration, the school determined that the requested information was irrelevant to the field trip activities and deleted the line with the gender marker request."

**5. How do schools ensure that a transgender student is called by the appropriate name and pronouns?**

One of the first issues that school officials may address when a student notifies them of a gender transition is determining which name and pronouns the student prefers. Some schools have adopted policies to prepare all school staff and students to use a student's newly adopted name, if any, and pronouns that are consistent with a student's gender identity.

- A regulation issued by Nevada's Washoe County School District ("Washoe County Regulation") provides that: "Students have the right to be addressed by the names and pronouns that correspond to their gender identity. Using the student's preferred name and pronoun promotes the safety and wellbeing of the student. When possible, the requested name shall be included in the District's electronic database in addition to the student's legal name, in order to inform faculty and staff of the name and pronoun to use when addressing the student."
- A procedure issued by Kansas City Public Schools in Missouri ("Kansas City Procedure") notes that: "The intentional or persistent refusal to respect the gender identity of an employee or student after notification of the preferred pronoun/name used by the employee or student is a violation of this procedure."
- The NYSED Guidance provides: "As with most other issues involved with creating a safe and supportive environment for transgender students, the best course is to engage the student, and possibly the parent, with respect to name and pronoun use, and agree on a plan to reflect the individual needs of each student to initiate that name and pronoun use within the school. The plan also could include when and how this is communicated to students and their parents."
- The DCPS Guidance includes a school planning guide for principals to review with transgender students as they plan how to ensure the school environment is safe and supportive. The school planning guide allows the student to identify the student's gender identity and preferred name, key contacts at home and at school, as well as develop plans for access to restrooms, locker rooms, and other school activities.

**6. How do schools handle requests to change the name or sex designation on a student's records?**

Some transgender students may legally change their names. However, transgender students often are unable to obtain identification documents that reflect their gender identity (e.g., due to financial limitations or legal restrictions imposed by state or local law). Some school district policies specify that they will use the name a student identifies as consistent with the student's gender identity regardless of whether the student has completed a legal name change.

- The NYSED Guidance provides that school records, including attendance records, transcripts, and Individualized Education Programs, be updated with the student's chosen name and offers an example: "One school administrator dealt with information in the student's file by starting a new file with the student's chosen name, entered previous academic records under the student's chosen name, and created a separate, confidential folder that contained the student's past information and birth name."
- The DCPS Guidance notes: "A court-ordered name or gender change is not required, and the student does not need to change their official records. If a student wishes to go by another name, the school's registrar can enter that name into the 'Preferred First' name field of [the school's] database."
- The Kansas City Procedure recognizes that there are certain situations where school staff or administrators may need to report a transgender student's legal name or gender. The procedure notes that in these situations, "school staff and administrators shall adopt practices to avoid the inadvertent disclosure of such confidential information."
- The Chicago Guidelines state: "Students are not required to obtain a court order and/or gender change or to change their official records as a prerequisite to being addressed by the name and pronoun that corresponds to their gender identity."
- The Massachusetts Guidance also addresses requests to amend records after graduation: "Transgender students who transition after having completed high school may ask their previous schools to amend school records or a diploma or transcript that include the student's birth name and gender. When requested, and when satisfied with the gender identity information provided, schools should amend the student's record."

## **Sex-Segregated Activities and Facilities**

### **7. How do schools ensure transgender students have access to facilities consistent with their gender identity?**

Schools often segregate restrooms and locker rooms by sex, but some schools have policies that students must be permitted to access facilities consistent with their gender identity and not be required to use facilities inconsistent with their gender identity or alternative facilities.

- The Washington State Guidelines provide: "School districts should allow students to use the restroom that is consistent with their gender identity consistently asserted at school." In addition, no student "should be required to use an alternative restroom because they are transgender or gender nonconforming."
- The Washoe County Regulation provides: "Students shall have access to use facilities that correspond to their gender identity as expressed by the student and asserted at school, irrespective of the gender listed on the student's records, including but not limited to locker rooms."
- The Anchorage Administrative Guidelines emphasize the following provision: "However, staff should not require a transgender or gender nonconforming student/employee to use a separate, nonintegrated space unless requested by the individual student/employee."

### **8. How do schools protect the privacy rights of all students in restrooms or locker rooms?**

Many students seek additional privacy in school restrooms and locker rooms. Some schools have provided students increased privacy by making adjustments to sex-segregated facilities or providing all students with access to alternative facilities.

- The Washington State Guidelines provide that any student who wants increased privacy should be provided access to an alternative restroom or changing area. The guidelines explain: "This allows students who may feel uncomfortable sharing the facility with the transgender student(s) the option to make use of a separate restroom and have their concerns addressed without stigmatizing any individual student."

- The NYSED Guidance gives an example of accommodating all students' interest in privacy: "In one high school, a transgender female student was given access to the female changing facility, but the student was uncomfortable using the female changing facility with other female students because there were no private changing areas within the facility. The principal examined the changing facility and determined that curtains could easily be put up along one side of a row of benches near the group lockers, providing private changing areas for any students who wished to use them. After the school put up the curtains, the student was comfortable using the changing facility."
- Atherton High School, in Jefferson County, Kentucky, issued a policy that offers examples of accommodations to address any student's request for increased privacy: "use of a private area within the public area of the locker room facility (e.g. nearby restroom stall with a door or an area separated by a curtain); use of a nearby private area (e.g. nearby restroom); or a separate changing schedule."
- The DCPS Guidance recommends talking to students to come up with an acceptable solution: "Ultimately, if a student expresses discomfort to any member of the school staff, that staff member should review these options with the student and ask the student permission to engage the school LGBTQ liaison or another designated ally in the building."

**9. How do schools ensure transgender students have the opportunity to participate in physical education and athletics consistent with their gender identity?**

Some school policies explain the procedures for establishing transgender students' eligibility to participate in athletics consistent with their gender identity. Many of those policies refer to procedures established by state athletics leagues or associations.

- The NYSED Guidance explains that "physical education is a required part of the curriculum and an important part of many students' lives. Most physical education classes in New York's schools are coed, so the gender identity of students should not be an issue with respect to these classes. Where there are sex-segregated classes, students should be allowed to participate in a manner consistent with their gender identity."
- The LAUSD Policy provides that "participation in competitive athletics, intramural sports, athletic teams, competitions, and contact sports shall be facilitated in a



manner consistent with the student's gender identity asserted at school and in accordance with the California Interscholastic Federation bylaws." The California Interscholastic Federation establishes a panel of professionals, including at least one person with training or expertise in gender identity health care or advocacy, to make eligibility decisions.

- The Rhode Island Interscholastic League's policy states that all students should have the opportunity to participate in athletics consistent with their gender identity, regardless of the gender listed on school records. The policy provides that the league will base its eligibility determination on the student's current transcript and school registration information, documentation of the student's consistent gender identification (*e.g.*, affirmed written statements from student, parent/guardian, or health care provider), and any other pertinent information.

**10. How do schools treat transgender students when they participate in field trips and athletic trips that require overnight accommodations?**

Schools often separate students by sex when providing overnight accommodations. Some school policies provide that students must be treated consistent with their gender identity in making such assignments.

- Colorado's Boulder Valley School District issued guidelines ("Boulder Valley Guidelines") providing that when a school plans overnight accommodations for a transgender student, it should consider "the goals of maximizing the student's social integration and equal opportunity to participate in overnight activity and athletic trips, ensuring the [transgender] student's safety and comfort, and minimizing stigmatization of the student."
- The Chicago Guidelines remind school staff: "In no case should a transgender student be denied the right to participate in an overnight field trip because of the student's transgender status."

## **Additional Practices to Support Transgender Students**

### **11. What can schools do to make transgender students comfortable in the classroom?**

Classroom practices that do not distinguish or differentiate students based on their gender are the most inclusive for all students, including transgender students.

- The DCPS Guidance suggests that “[w]herever arbitrary gender dividers can be avoided, they should be eliminated.”
- The Massachusetts Guidance states that “[a]s a general matter, schools should evaluate all gender-based policies, rules, and practices and maintain only those that have a clear and sound pedagogical purpose.”
- Minneapolis Public Schools issued a policy providing that students generally should not be grouped on the basis of sex for the purpose of instruction or study, but rather on bases such as student proficiency in the area of study, student interests, or educational needs for acceleration or enrichment.
- The Maryland State Department of Education issued guidelines that include an example of eliminating gender-based sorting of students: “Old Practice: boys line up over here.” New Practice: birthdays between January and June; everybody who is wearing something green, etc.”

### **12. How do school dress codes apply to transgender students?**

Dress codes that apply the same requirements regardless of gender are the most inclusive for all students and avoid unnecessarily reinforcing sex stereotypes. To the extent a school has a dress code that applies different standards to male and female students, some schools have policies that allow transgender students to dress consistent with their gender identity.

- Wisconsin’s Shorewood School District issued guidelines (“Shorewood Guidelines”) that allow students to dress in accordance with their gender identity and remind school personnel that they must not enforce a dress code more strictly against transgender and gender nonconforming students than other students.
- The Washington State Guidelines encourage school districts to adopt gender-neutral dress codes that do not restrict a student’s clothing choices on the basis of gender: “Dress codes should be based on educationally relevant considerations, apply

consistently to all students, include consistent discipline for violations, and make reasonable accommodations when the situation requires an exception.”

### **13. How do schools address bullying and harassment of transgender students?**

Unfortunately, bullying and harassment continue to be a problem facing many students, and transgender students are no exception. Some schools make clear in their nondiscrimination statements that prohibited sex discrimination includes discrimination based on gender identity and expression. Their policies also address this issue.

- The NYSED Guidance stresses the importance of protecting students from bullying and harassment because “[the] high rates experienced by transgender students correspond to adverse health and educational consequences,” including higher rates of absenteeism, lower academic achievement, and stunted educational aspirations.
- The Shorewood Guidelines specify that harassment based on a student’s actual or perceived transgender status or gender nonconformity is prohibited and notes that these complaints are to be handled in the same manner as other discrimination, harassment, and bullying complaints.
- The DCPS Guidance provides examples of prohibited harassment that transgender students sometimes experience, including misusing an individual’s preferred name or pronouns on purpose, asking personal questions about a person’s body or gender transition, and disclosing private information.

### **14. How do school psychologists, school counselors, school nurses, and school social workers support transgender students?**

School counselors can help transgender students who may experience mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress. Mental health staff may also consult with school administrators to create inclusive policies, programs, and practices that prevent bullying and harassment and ensure classrooms and schools are safe, healthy, and supportive places where all students, including transgender students, are respected and can express themselves. Schools will be in a better position to support transgender students if they communicate to all students that resources are available, and that they are competent to provide support and services to any student who has questions related to gender identity.

- The NYSED Guidance suggests that counselors can serve as a point of contact for transgender students who seek to take initial steps to assert their gender identity in school.
- The Chicago Guidelines convene a student administrative support team to determine the appropriate supports for transgender students. The team consists of the school principal, the student, adults that the student trusts, and individuals the principal determines may have a legitimate interest in the safety and healthy development of the student.

**15. How do schools foster respect for transgender students among members of the broader school community?**

Developing a clear policy explaining how to support transgender students can help communicate the importance the school places on creating a safe, healthy, and nondiscriminatory school climate for all students. Schools can do this by providing educational programs aimed at staff, students, families, and other community members.

- The Massachusetts Guidance informs superintendents and principals that they “need to review existing policies, handbooks, and other written materials to ensure they are updated to reflect the inclusion of gender identity in the student antidiscrimination law, and may wish to inform all members of the school community, including school personnel, students, and families of the recent change to state law and its implications for school policy and practice. This could take the form of a letter that states the school’s commitment to being a supportive, inclusive environment for all students.”
- The NYSED Guidance states that “school districts are encouraged to provide this guidance document and other resources, such as trainings and information sessions, to the school community including, but not limited to, parents, students, staff and residents.”

**16. What topics do schools address when training staff on issues related to transgender students?**

Schools can reinforce commitments to providing safe, healthy, and nondiscriminatory school climates by training all school personnel about appropriate and respectful treatment of all students, including transgender students.

- The Massachusetts Guidance suggests including the following topics in faculty and staff training “key terms related to gender identity and expression; the development of gender identity; the experiences of transgender and other gender nonconforming students; risks and resilience data regarding transgender and gender nonconforming students; ways to support transgender students and to improve school climate for gender nonconforming students; [and] gender-neutral language and practices.”
- The El Rancho Regulation states that the superintendent or designee “shall provide to employees, volunteers, and parents/guardians training and information regarding the district’s nondiscrimination policy; what constitutes prohibited discrimination, harassment, intimidation, or bullying; how and to whom a report of an incident should be made; and how to guard against segregating or stereotyping students when providing instruction, guidance, supervision, or other services to them. Such training and information shall include guidelines for addressing issues related to transgender and gender-nonconforming students.”

**17. How do schools respond to complaints about the way transgender students are treated?**

School policies often provide that complaints from transgender students be handled under the same policy used to resolve other complaints of discrimination or harassment.

- The Boulder Valley Guidelines provide that “complaints alleging discrimination or harassment based on a person’s actual or perceived transgender status or gender nonconformity are to be handled in the same manner as other discrimination or harassment complaints.”
- The Anchorage Administrative Guidelines provide that “students may also use the Student Grievance Process to address any civil rights issue, including transgender issues at school.”

## Terminology

### 18. What terms are defined in current school policies on transgender students?

Understanding the needs of transgender students includes understanding relevant terminology. Most school policies define commonly used terms to assist schools in understanding key concepts relevant to transgender students. The list below is not exhaustive, and only includes examples of some of the most common terms that school policies define.

- *Gender identity* refers to a person's deeply felt internal sense of being male or female, regardless of their sex assigned at birth. (Washington State Guidelines)
- *Sex assigned at birth* refers to the sex designation, usually "male" or "female," assigned to a person when they are born. (NYSED Guidance)
- *Gender expression* refers to the manner in which a person represents or expresses gender to others, often through behavior, clothing, hairstyles, activities, voice or mannerisms. (Washoe County Regulation)
- *Transgender* or *trans* describes a person whose gender identity does not correspond to their assigned sex at birth. (Massachusetts Guidance)
- *Gender transition* refers to the process in which a person goes from living and identifying as one gender to living and identifying as another. (Washoe County Regulation)
- *Cisgender* describes a person whose gender identity corresponds to their assigned sex at birth. (NYSED Guidance)
- *Gender nonconforming* describes people whose gender expression differs from stereotypic expectations. The terms *gender variant* or *gender atypical* are also used. Gender nonconforming individuals may identify as male, female, some combination of both, or neither. (NYSED Guidance)
- *Intersex* describes individuals born with chromosomes, hormones, genitalia and/or other sex characteristics that are not exclusively male or female as defined by the medical establishment in our society. (DCPS Guidance)
- *LGBTQ* is an acronym that stands for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning." (LAUSD Policy)

- *Sexual orientation* refers to a person's emotional and sexual attraction to another person based on the gender of the other person. Common terms used to describe sexual orientation include, but are not limited to, heterosexual, lesbian, gay, and bisexual. Sexual orientation and gender identity are different. (LAUSD Policy)

**19. How do schools account for individual preferences and the diverse ways that students describe and express their gender?**

Some students may use different terms to identify themselves or describe their situations. For example, a transgender male student may identify simply as male, consistent with his gender identity. The same principles apply even if students use different terms. Some school policies directly address this question and provide additional guidance.

- The Washington State Guidelines recognize how "terminology can differ based on religion, language, race, ethnicity, age, culture and many other factors."
- Washington's Federal Way School District issued a resource guide that states: "Keep in mind that the meaning of gender conformity can vary from culture to culture, so these may not translate exactly to Western ideas of what it means to be transgender. Some of these identities include Hijra (South Asia), Fa'afafine (Samoa), Kathoey (Thailand), Travesti (South America), and Two-Spirit (Native American/First Nations)."
- The Washoe County Regulation, responding to cultural diversity within the state, offers examples of "ways in which transgender and gender nonconforming youth describe their lives and gendered experiences: trans, transsexual, transgender, male-to-female (MTF), female-to-male (FTM), bi-gender, two-spirit, trans man, and trans woman."
- The DCPS Guidance provides this advice to staff: "If you are unsure about a student's preferred name or pronouns, it is appropriate to privately and tactfully ask the student what they prefer to be called. Additionally, when speaking about a student it is rarely necessary to label them as being transgender, as they should be treated the same as the rest of their peers."

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  - National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, [safesupportivelearning.ed.gov](http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov)
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  - Administration for Children and Families, *Resources for Serving Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth*, <http://ncfy.acf.hhs.gov/features/serving-lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-and-questioning-youth-open-arms/resources-serving>
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

Questions and Answers on Title IX and Sexual Violence<sup>1</sup>

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 ("Title IX")<sup>2</sup> is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in federally funded education programs and activities. All public and private elementary and secondary schools, school districts, colleges, and universities receiving any federal financial assistance (hereinafter "schools", "recipients", or "recipient institutions") must comply with Title IX.<sup>3</sup>

On April 4, 2011, the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the U.S. Department of Education issued a Dear Colleague Letter on student-on-student sexual harassment and sexual violence ("DCL").<sup>4</sup> The DCL explains a school's responsibility to respond promptly and effectively to sexual violence against students in accordance with the requirements of Title IX.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, the DCL:

- Provides guidance on the unique concerns that arise in sexual violence cases, such as a school's independent responsibility under Title IX to investigate (apart from any separate criminal investigation by local police) and address sexual violence.

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<sup>1</sup> The Department has determined that this document is a "significant guidance document" under the Office of Management and Budget's Final Bulletin for Agency Good Guidance Practices, 72 Fed. Reg. 3432 (Jan. 25, 2007), available at [www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/fedreg/2007/012507\\_good\\_guidance.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/fedreg/2007/012507_good_guidance.pdf). The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) issues this and other policy guidance to provide recipients with information to assist them in meeting their obligations, and to provide members of the public with information about their rights, under the civil rights laws and implementing regulations that we enforce. OCR's legal authority is based on those laws and regulations. This guidance does not add requirements to applicable law, but provides information and examples to inform recipients about how OCR evaluates whether covered entities are complying with their legal obligations. If you are interested in commenting on this guidance, please send an e-mail with your comments to [OCR@ed.gov](mailto:OCR@ed.gov), or write to the following address: Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20202.

<sup>2</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 1681 *et seq.*

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this document the term "schools" refers to recipients of federal financial assistance that operate educational programs or activities. For Title IX purposes, at the elementary and secondary school level, the recipient generally is the school district; and at the postsecondary level, the recipient is the individual institution of higher education. An educational institution that is controlled by a religious organization is exempt from Title IX to the extent that the law's requirements conflict with the organization's religious tenets. 20 U.S.C. § 1681(a)(3); 34 C.F.R. § 106.12(a). For application of this provision to a specific institution, please contact the appropriate OCR regional office.

<sup>4</sup> Available at <http://www.ed.gov/ocr/letters/colleague-201104.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Although this document and the DCL focus on sexual violence, the legal principles generally also apply to other forms of sexual harassment.

- Provides guidance and examples about key Title IX requirements and how they relate to sexual violence, such as the requirements to publish a policy against sex discrimination, designate a Title IX coordinator, and adopt and publish grievance procedures.

- Discusses proactive efforts schools can take to prevent sexual violence.

Discusses the interplay between Title IX, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA"),<sup>6</sup> and the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security and Campus Crime Statistics Act ("Clery Act")<sup>7</sup> as it relates to a complainant's right to know the outcome of his or her complaint, including relevant sanctions imposed on the perpetrator.

- Provides examples of remedies and enforcement strategies that schools and OCR may use to respond to sexual violence.

The DCL supplements OCR's *Revised Sexual Harassment Guidance: Harassment of Students by School Employees, Other Students, or Third Parties*, issued in 2001 (*2001 Guidance*).<sup>8</sup> The *2001 Guidance* discusses in detail the Title IX requirements related to sexual harassment of students by school employees, other students, or third parties. The DCL and the *2001 Guidance* remain in full force and we recommend reading these Questions and Answers in conjunction with these documents.

In responding to requests for technical assistance, OCR has determined that elementary and secondary schools and postsecondary institutions would benefit from additional guidance concerning their obligations under Title IX to address sexual violence as a form of sexual harassment. The following questions and answers further clarify the legal requirements and guidance articulated in the DCL and the *2001 Guidance* and include examples of proactive efforts schools can take to prevent sexual violence and remedies schools may use to end such conduct, prevent its recurrence, and address its effects. In order to gain a complete understanding of these legal requirements and recommendations, this document should be read in full.

Authorized by

/s/

Catherine E. Lhamon  
Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights

April 29, 2014

<sup>6</sup> 20 U.S.C. §1232g; 34 C.F.R. Part 99.

<sup>7</sup> 20 U.S.C. §1092(f).

<sup>8</sup> Available at <http://www.ed.gov/ocr/docs/shguide.html>.

Notice of Language Assistance  
Questions and Answers on Title IX and Sexual Violence

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## A. A School's Obligation to Respond to Sexual Violence

### A-1. What is sexual violence?

Sexual violence, as that term is used in this document and prior OCR guidance, refers to physical sexual acts perpetrated against a person's will or where a person is incapable of giving consent (e.g., due to the student's age or use of drugs or alcohol, or because an intellectual or other disability prevents the student from having the capacity to give consent). A number of different acts fall into the category of sexual violence, including rape, sexual assault, sexual battery, sexual abuse, and sexual coercion. Sexual violence can be carried out by school employees, other students, or third parties. All such acts of sexual violence are forms of sex discrimination prohibited by Title IX.

### A-2. How does Title IX apply to student-on-student sexual violence?

Answer: Under Title IX, federal- or funded schools must ensure that students of all ages are not denied or limited in their ability to participate in or benefit from the school's educational programs or activities on the basis of sex. A school violates a student's rights under Title IX regarding student-on-student sexual violence when the following conditions are met: (1) the alleged conduct is sufficiently serious to limit or deny a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the school's educational program, *i.e.* creates a hostile environment; and (2) the school, upon notice, fails to take prompt and effective steps reasonably calculated to end the sexual violence, eliminate the hostile environment, prevent its recurrence, and, as appropriate, remedy its effects.<sup>9</sup>

### A-3. How does OCR determine if a hostile environment has been created?

Answer: As discussed more fully in OCR's *2001 Guidance*, OCR considers a variety of related factors to determine if a hostile environment has been created; and also considers the conduct in question from both a subjective and an objective perspective. Specifically, OCR's standards require that the conduct be evaluated from the perspective of a reasonable person in the alleged victim's position, considering all the circumstances. The more severe the conduct, the less need there is to show a repetitive series of incidents to prove a hostile environment, particularly if the conduct is physical. Indeed, a single or isolated incident of sexual violence may create a hostile environment.

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<sup>9</sup> This is the standard for administrative enforcement of Title IX and in court cases where plaintiffs are seeking injunctive relief. See *2001 Guidance* at ii-v, 12-13. The standard in private lawsuits for monetary damages is actual knowledge and deliberate indifference. See *Davis v. Monroe Cnty Bd. of Educ.*, 526 U.S. 629, 643 (1999).

**A-4. When does OCR consider a school to have notice of student-on-student sexual violence?**

**Answer:** OCR deems a school to have notice of student-on-student sexual violence if a responsible employee knew, or in the exercise of reasonable care should have known, about the sexual violence. See question D-2 regarding who is a responsible employee.

A school can receive notice of sexual violence in many different ways. Some examples of notice include: a student may have filed a grievance with or otherwise informed the school's Title IX coordinator; a student, parent, friend, or other individual may have reported an incident to a teacher, principal, campus law enforcement, staff in the office of student affairs, or other responsible employee; or a teacher or dean may have witnessed the sexual violence.

The school may also receive notice about sexual violence in an indirect manner, from sources such as a member of the local community, social networking sites, or the media. In some situations, if the school knows of incidents of sexual violence, the exercise of reasonable care should trigger an investigation that would lead to the discovery of additional incidents. For example, if school officials receive a credible report that a student has perpetrated several acts of sexual violence against different students, that pattern of conduct should trigger an inquiry as to whether other students have been subjected to sexual violence by that student. In other cases, the pervasiveness of the sexual violence may be widespread, openly practiced, or well-known among students or employees. In those cases, OCR may conclude that the school should have known of the hostile environment. In other words, if the school would have found out about the sexual violence had it made a proper inquiry, knowledge of the sexual violence will be imputed to the school even if the school failed to make an inquiry. A school's failure to take prompt and effective corrective action in such cases (as described in questions G-1 to G-3 and H-1 to H-3) would violate Title IX even if the student did not use the school's grievance procedures or otherwise inform the school of the sexual violence.

**A-5. What are a school's basic responsibilities to address student-on-student sexual violence?**

**Answer:** When a school knows or reasonably should know of possible sexual violence, it must take immediate and appropriate steps to investigate or otherwise determine what occurred (subject to the confidentiality provisions discussed in Section E). If an investigation reveals that sexual violence created a hostile environment, the school must then take prompt and effective steps reasonably calculated to end the sexual violence, eliminate the hostile environment, prevent its recurrence, and, as appropriate, remedy its

effects. But a school should not wait to take steps to protect its students until students have already been deprived of educational opportunities.

Title IX requires a school to protect the complainant and ensure his or her safety as necessary, including taking interim steps before the final outcome of an investigation.<sup>10</sup> The school should take these steps promptly once it has notice of a sexual violence allegation and should provide the complainant with periodic updates on the status of the investigation. If the school determines that the sexual violence occurred, the school must continue to take these steps to protect the complainant and ensure his or her safety, as necessary. The school should also ensure that the complainant is aware of any available resources, such as victim advocacy, housing assistance, academic support, counseling, disability services, health and mental health services, and legal assistance, and the right to report a crime to campus or local law enforcement. For additional information on interim measures, see questions G-1 to G-3.

If a school delays responding to allegations of sexual violence or responds inappropriately, the school's own inaction may subject the student to a hostile environment. If it does, the school will also be required to remedy the effects of the sexual violence that could reasonably have been prevented had the school responded promptly and appropriately. For example, if a school's ignoring of a student's complaints of sexual assault by a fellow student results in the complaining student having to remain in classes with the other student for several weeks and the complaining student's grades suffer because he or she was unable to concentrate in these classes, the school may need to permit the complaining student to retake the classes without an academic or financial penalty (in addition to any other remedies) in order to address the effects of the sexual violence.

**A-6. Does Title IX cover employee-on-student sexual violence, such as sexual abuse of children?**

**Answer:** Yes. Although this document and the DCL focus on student-on-student sexual violence, Title IX also protects students from other forms of sexual harassment (including sexual violence and sexual abuse), such as sexual harassment carried out by school employees. Sexual harassment by school employees can include unwelcome sexual advances; requests for sexual favors; and other verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature, including but not limited to sexual activity. Title IX's prohibition against

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<sup>10</sup> Throughout this document, unless otherwise noted, the term "complainant" refers to the student who allegedly experienced the sexual violence.

sexual harassment generally does not extend to legitimate nonsexual touching or other nonsexual conduct. But in some circumstances, nonsexual conduct may take on sexual connotations and rise to the level of sexual harassment. For example, a teacher repeatedly hugging and putting his or her arms around students under inappropriate circumstances could create a hostile environment. Early signs of inappropriate behavior with a child can be the key to identifying and preventing sexual abuse by school personnel.

A school's Title IX obligations regarding sexual harassment by employees can, in some instances, be greater than those described in this document and the DCL. Recipients should refer to OCR's *2001 Guidance* for further information about Title IX obligations regarding harassment of students by school employees. In addition, many state and local laws have mandatory reporting requirements for schools working with minors. Recipients should be careful to satisfy their state and local legal obligations in addition to their Title IX obligations, including training to ensure that school employees are aware of their obligations under such state and local laws and the consequences for failing to satisfy those obligations.

With respect to sexual activity in particular, OCR will always view as unwelcome and nonconsensual sexual activity between an adult school employee and an elementary school student or any student below the legal age of consent in his or her state. In cases involving a student who meets the legal age of consent in his or her state, there will still be a strong presumption that sexual activity between an adult school employee and a student is unwelcome and nonconsensual. When a school is on notice that a school employee has sexually harassed a student, it is responsible for taking prompt and effective steps reasonably calculated to end the sexual harassment, eliminate the hostile environment, prevent its recurrence, and remedy its effects. Indeed, even if a school was not on notice, the school is nonetheless responsible for remedying any effects of the sexual harassment on the student, as well as for ending the sexual harassment and preventing its recurrence, when the employee engaged in the sexual activity in the context of the employee's provision of aid, benefits, or services to students (*e.g.*, teaching, counseling, supervising, advising, or transporting students).

A school should take steps to protect its students from sexual abuse by its employees. It is therefore imperative for a school to develop policies prohibiting inappropriate conduct by school personnel and procedures for identifying and responding to such conduct. For example, this could include implementing codes of conduct, which might address what is commonly known as grooming – a desensitization strategy common in adult educator sexual misconduct. Such policies and procedures can ensure that students, parents, and

school personnel have clear guidelines on what are appropriate and inappropriate interactions between adults and students in a school setting or in school-sponsored activities. Additionally, a school should provide training for administrators, teachers, staff, parents, and age-appropriate classroom information for students to ensure that everyone understands what types of conduct are prohibited and knows how to respond when problems arise<sup>11</sup>

### 8. Students Protected by Title IX

#### 8-1. Does Title IX protect all students from sexual violence?

Answer: Yes. Title IX protects all students at recipient institutions from sex discrimination, including sexual violence. Any student can experience sexual violence: from elementary to professional school students; male and female students; straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students; part-time and full-time students; students with and without disabilities, and students of different races and national origins.

#### 8-2. How should a school handle sexual violence complaints in which the complainant and the alleged perpetrator are members of the same sex?

Answer: A school's obligation to respond appropriately to sexual violence complaints is the same irrespective of the sex or sexes of the parties involved. Title IX protects all students from sexual violence, regardless of the sex of the alleged perpetrator or complainant, including when they are members of the same sex. A school must investigate and resolve allegations of sexual violence involving parties of the same sex using the same procedures and standards that it uses in all complaints involving sexual violence.

Title IX's sex discrimination prohibition extends to claims of discrimination based on gender identity or failure to conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity or femininity and OCR accepts such complaints for investigation. Similarly, the actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity of the parties does not change a school's obligations. Indeed, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth report high rates of sexual harassment and sexual violence. A school should investigate and resolve allegations of sexual violence regarding LGBT students using the same procedures and standards that it

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<sup>11</sup> For additional information on training please see the Department of Education's Resource and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center – Adult Sexual Misconduct in Schools: Prevention and Management Training, available at [http://rems.ed.gov/Docs/ASM\\_Marketing\\_Flyer.pdf](http://rems.ed.gov/Docs/ASM_Marketing_Flyer.pdf).



uses in all complaints involving sexual violence. The fact that incidents of sexual violence may be accompanied by anti-gay comments or be partly based on a student's actual or perceived sexual orientation does not relieve a school of its obligation under Title IX to investigate and remedy those instances of sexual violence.

If a school's policies related to sexual violence include examples of particular types of conduct that violate the school's prohibition on sexual violence, the school should consider including examples of same-sex conduct. In addition, a school should ensure that staff are capable of providing culturally competent counseling to all complainants. Thus, a school should ensure that its counselors and other staff who are responsible for receiving and responding to complaints of sexual violence, including investigators and hearing board members, receive appropriate training about working with LGBT and gender-nonconforming students and same-sex sexual violence. See questions J-1 to J-4 for additional information regarding training.

Gay-straight alliances and similar student-initiated groups can also play an important role in creating safer school environments for LGBT students. On June 14, 2011, the Department issued guidance about the rights of student-initiated groups in public secondary schools under the Equal Access Act. That guidance is available at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/110607.html>.

**B-3. What issues may arise with respect to students with disabilities who experience sexual violence?**

**Answer:** When students with disabilities experience sexual violence, federal civil rights laws other than Title IX may also be relevant to a school's responsibility to investigate and address such incidents.<sup>12</sup> Certain students require additional assistance and support. For example, students with intellectual disabilities may need additional help in learning about sexual violence, including a school's sexual violence education and prevention programs, what constitutes sexual violence and how students can report incidents of sexual

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<sup>12</sup> OCR enforces two civil rights laws that prohibit disability discrimination. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) prohibits disability discrimination by public or private entities that receive federal financial assistance, and Title II of the American with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Title II) prohibits disability discrimination by all state and local public entities, regardless of whether they receive federal funding. See 29 U.S.C. § 794 and 34 C.F.R. part 104; 42 U.S.C. § 12131 *et seq.* and 28 C.F.R. part 35. OCR and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) share the responsibility of enforcing Title II in the educational context. The Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs in the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services administers Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). 20 U.S.C. 1400 *et seq.* and 34 C.F.R. part 300. IDEA provides financial assistance to states, and through them to local educational agencies, to assist in providing special education and related services to eligible children with disabilities ages three through twenty-one, inclusive.

violence. In addition, students with disabilities who experience sexual violence may require additional services and supports, including psychological services and counseling services. Postsecondary students who need these additional services and supports can seek assistance from the institution's disability resource office.

A student who has not been previously determined to have a disability may, as a result of experiencing sexual violence, develop a mental health-related disability that could cause the student to need special education and related services. At the elementary and secondary education level, this may trigger a school's child find obligations under IDEA and the evaluation and placement requirements under Section 504, which together require a school to evaluate a student suspected of having a disability to determine if he or she has a disability that requires special education or related aids and services.<sup>13</sup>

A school must also ensure that any school reporting forms, information, or training about sexual violence be provided in a manner that is accessible to students and employees with disabilities, for example, by providing electronically-accessible versions of paper forms to individuals with print disabilities, or by providing a sign language interpreter to a deaf individual attending a training. See question J-4 for more detailed information on student training.

**B-4. What issues arise with respect to international students and undocumented students who experience sexual violence?**

Answer: Title IX protects all students at recipient institutions in the United States regardless of national origin, immigration status, or citizenship status.<sup>14</sup> A school should ensure that all students regardless of their immigration status, including undocumented students and international students, are aware of their rights under Title IX. A school must also ensure that any school reporting forms, information, or training about sexual violence be provided in a manner accessible to students who are English language learners. OCR recommends that a school coordinate with its international office and its undocumented student program coordinator, if applicable, to help communicate information about Title IX in languages that are accessible to these groups of students. OCR also encourages schools to provide foreign national complainants with information about the U nonimmigrant status and the T nonimmigrant status. The U nonimmigrant status is set

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<sup>13</sup> See 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.8; 300.111; 300.201; 300.300-300.311 (IDEA); 34 C.F.R. §§ 104.3(j) and 104.35 (Section 504). Schools must comply with applicable consent requirements with respect to evaluations. See 34 C.F.R. § 300.300.

<sup>14</sup> OCR enforces Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination by recipients of federal financial assistance on the basis of race, color, or national origin. 42 U.S.C. § 2000d.

aside for victims of certain crimes who have suffered substantial mental or physical abuse as a result of the crime and are helpful to law enforcement agency in the investigation or prosecution of the qualifying criminal activity.<sup>15</sup> The T nonimmigrant status is available for victims of severe forms of human trafficking who generally comply with a law enforcement agency in the investigation or prosecution of the human trafficking and who would suffer extreme hardship involving unusual and severe harm if they were removed from the United States.<sup>16</sup>

A school should be mindful that unique issues may arise when a foreign student on a student visa experiences sexual violence. For example, certain student visas require the student to maintain a full-time course load (generally at least 12 academic credit hours per term), but a student may need to take a reduced course load while recovering from the immediate effects of the sexual violence. OCR recommends that a school take steps to ensure that international students on student visas understand that they must typically seek prior approval of the designated school official (DSO) for student visas to drop below a full-time course load. A school may also want to encourage its employees involved in handling sexual violence complaints and counseling students who have experienced sexual violence to approach the DSO on the student's behalf if the student wishes to drop below a full-time course load. OCR recommends that a school take steps to ensure that its employees who work with international students, including the school's DSO, are trained on the school's sexual violence policies and that employees involved in handling sexual violence complaints and counseling students who have experienced sexual violence are aware of the special issues that international students may encounter. See questions J-1 to J-4 for additional information regarding training.

A school should also be aware that threatening students with deportation or invoking a student's immigration status in an attempt to intimidate or deter a student from filing a Title IX complaint would violate Title IX's protections against retaliation. For more information on retaliation see question K-1.

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<sup>15</sup> For more information on the U nonimmigrant status, see <http://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/victims-human-trafficking-other-crimes/victims-criminal-activity-u-nonimmigrant-status/questions-answers-victims-criminal-activity-u-nonimmigrant-status>.

<sup>16</sup> For more information on the T nonimmigrant status, see <http://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/victims-human-trafficking-other-crimes/victims-human-trafficking-t-nonimmigrant-status>.

**B-5. How should a school respond to sexual violence when the alleged perpetrator is not affiliated with the school?**

*Answer:* The appropriate response will differ depending on the level of control the school has over the alleged perpetrator. For example, if an athlete or band member from a visiting school sexually assaults a student at the home school, the home school may not be able to discipline or take other direct action against the visiting athlete or band member. However (and subject to the confidentiality provisions discussed in Section E), it should conduct an inquiry into what occurred and should report the incident to the visiting school and encourage the visiting school to take appropriate action to prevent further sexual violence. The home school should also notify the student of any right to file a complaint with the alleged perpetrator's school or local law enforcement. The home school may also decide not to invite the visiting school back to its campus.

Even though a school's ability to take direct action against a particular perpetrator may be limited, the school must still take steps to provide appropriate remedies for the complainant and, where appropriate, the broader school population. This may include providing support services for the complainant, and issuing new policy statements making it clear that the school does not tolerate sexual violence and will respond to any reports about such incidents. For additional information on interim measures see questions G-1 to G-3.

**C. Title IX Procedural Requirements**

**Overview**

**C-1. What procedures must a school have in place to prevent sexual violence and resolve complaints?**

*Answer:* The Title IX regulations outline three key procedural requirements. Each school must:

(1) disseminate a notice of nondiscrimination (see question C-2);<sup>17</sup>

(2) designate at least one employee to coordinate its efforts to comply with and carry out its responsibilities under Title IX (see questions C-3 to C-4);<sup>18</sup> and

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<sup>17</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 106.9.

<sup>18</sup> *Id.* § 106.8(a).

(3) adopt and publish grievance procedures providing for the prompt and equitable resolution of student and employee sex discrimination complaints (see questions C-5 to C-6).<sup>19</sup>

These requirements apply to all forms of sex discrimination and are particularly important for preventing and effectively responding to sexual violence.

Procedural requirements under other federal laws may also apply to complaints of sexual violence, including the requirements of the Clery Act.<sup>20</sup> For additional information about the procedural requirements in the Clery Act, please see <http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/campus.html>.

#### Notice of Nondiscrimination

C-2. What information must be included in a school's notice of nondiscrimination?

Answer: The notice of nondiscrimination must state that the school does not discriminate on the basis of sex in its education programs and activities, and that it is required by Title IX not to discriminate in such a manner. The notice must state that questions regarding Title IX may be referred to the school's Title IX coordinator or to OCR. The school must notify all of its students and employees of the name or title, office address, telephone number, and email address of the school's designated Title IX coordinator.<sup>21</sup>

#### Title IX Coordinator

C-3. What are a Title IX coordinator's responsibilities?

Answer: A Title IX coordinator's core responsibilities include overseeing the school's response to Title IX reports and complaints and identifying and addressing any patterns or systemic problems revealed by such reports and complaints. This means that the Title IX coordinator must have knowledge of the requirements of Title IX, of the school's own policies and procedures on sex discrimination, and of all complaints raising Title IX issues throughout the school. To accomplish this, subject to the exemption for school counseling employees discussed in question E-3, the Title IX coordinator must be informed of all

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<sup>19</sup> *Id.* § 106.8(b).

<sup>20</sup> All postsecondary institutions participating in the Higher Education Act's Title IV student financial assistance programs must comply with the Clery Act.

<sup>21</sup> For more information on notices of nondiscrimination, please see OCR's Notice of Nondiscrimination (August 2010), available at <http://www.ed.gov/ocr/docs/nondisc.pdf>.

reports and complaints raising Title IX issues, even if the report or complaint was initially filed with another individual or office or if the investigation will be conducted by another individual or office. The school should ensure that the Title IX coordinator is given the training, authority, and visibility necessary to fulfill these responsibilities.

Because the Title IX coordinator must have knowledge of all Title IX reports and complaints at the school, this individual (when properly trained) is generally in the best position to evaluate a student's request for confidentiality in the context of the school's responsibility to provide a safe and nondiscriminatory environment for all students. A school may determine, however, that another individual should perform this role. For additional information on confidentiality requests, see questions E-1 to E-4. If a school relies in part on its disciplinary procedures to meet its Title IX obligations, the Title IX coordinator should review the disciplinary procedures to ensure that the procedures comply with the prompt and equitable requirements of Title IX as discussed in question D-5.

In addition to these core responsibilities, a school may decide to give its Title IX coordinator additional responsibilities, such as: providing training to students, faculty, and staff on Title IX issues; conducting Title IX investigations, including investigating facts relevant to a complaint, and determining appropriate sanctions against the perpetrator and remedies for the complainant; determining appropriate interim measures for a complainant upon learning of a report or complaint of sexual violence; and ensuring that appropriate policies and procedures are in place for working with local law enforcement and coordinating services with local victim advocacy organizations and service providers, including rape crisis centers. A school must ensure that its Title IX coordinator is appropriately trained in all areas over which he or she has responsibility. The Title IX coordinator or designee should also be available to meet with students as needed.

If a school designates more than one Title IX coordinator, the school's notice of nondiscrimination and Title IX grievance procedures should describe each coordinator's responsibilities, and one coordinator should be designated as having ultimate oversight responsibility.

**C-4. Are there any employees who should not serve as the Title IX coordinator?**

**Answer:** Title IX does not categorically preclude particular employees from serving as Title IX coordinators. However, Title IX coordinators should not have other job responsibilities that may create a conflict of interest. Because some complaints may raise issues as to whether or how well the school has met its Title IX obligations, designating

the same employee to serve both as the Title IX coordinator and the general counsel (which could include representing the school in legal claims alleging Title IX violations) poses a serious risk of a conflict of interest. Other employees whose job responsibilities may conflict with a Title IX coordinator's responsibilities include Directors of Athletics, Deans of Students, and any employee who serves on the judicial/hearing board or to whom an appeal might be made. Designating a full-time Title IX coordinator will minimize the risk of a conflict of interest.

### Grievance Procedures

C-5. Under Title IX, what elements should be included in a school's procedures for responding to complaints of sexual violence?

Answer: Title IX requires that a school adopt and publish grievance procedures providing for prompt and equitable resolution of student and employee complaints of sex discrimination, including sexual violence. In evaluating whether a school's grievance procedures satisfy this requirement, OCR will review all aspects of a school's policies and practices, including the following elements that are critical to achieve compliance with Title IX:

- (1) notice to students, parents of elementary and secondary students, and employees of the grievance procedures, including where complaints may be filed;
- (2) application of the grievance procedures to complaints filed by students or on their behalf alleging sexual violence carried out by employees, other students, or third parties;
- (3) provisions for adequate, reliable, and impartial investigation of complaints, including the opportunity for both the complainant and alleged perpetrator to present witnesses and evidence;
- (4) designated and reasonably prompt time frames for the major stages of the complaint process (see question F-8);
- (5) written notice to the complainant and alleged perpetrator of the outcome of the complaint (see question H-3); and
- (6) assurance that the school will take steps to prevent recurrence of any sexual violence and remedy discriminatory effects on the complainant and others, if appropriate.

To ensure that students and employees have a clear understanding of what constitutes sexual violence, the potential consequences for such conduct, and how the school processes complaints, a school's Title IX grievance procedures should also explicitly include the following in writing, some of which themselves are mandatory obligations under Title IX:

- (1) a statement of the school's jurisdiction over Title IX complaints;
- (2) adequate definitions of sexual harassment (which includes sexual violence) and an explanation as to when such conduct creates a hostile environment;
- (3) reporting policies and protocols, including provisions for confidential reporting;
- (4) identification of the employee or employees responsible for evaluating requests for confidentiality;
- (5) notice that Title IX prohibits retaliation;
- (6) notice of a student's right to file a criminal complaint and a Title IX complaint simultaneously;
- (7) notice of available interim measures that may be taken to protect the student in the educational setting;
- (8) the evidentiary standard that must be used (preponderance of the evidence) (*i.e.*, more likely than not that sexual violence occurred) in resolving a complaint;
- (9) notice of potential remedies for students;
- (10) notice of potential sanctions against perpetrators; and
- (11) sources of counseling, advocacy, and support.

For more information on interim measures, see questions G-1 to G-3.

The rights established under Title IX must be interpreted consistently with any federally guaranteed due process rights. Procedures that ensure the Title IX rights of the complainant, while at the same time according any federally guaranteed due process to both parties involved, will lead to sound and supportable decisions. Of course, a school should ensure that steps to accord any due process rights do not restrict or unnecessarily delay the protections provided by Title IX to the complainant.



A school's procedures and practices will vary in detail, specificity, and components, reflecting differences in the age of its students, school size and administrative structure, state or local legal requirements (e.g., mandatory reporting requirements for schools working with minors), and what it has learned from past experiences.

C-5. Is a school required to use separate grievance procedures for sexual violence complaints?

Answer: No. Under Title IX, a school may use student disciplinary procedures, general Title IX grievance procedures, sexual harassment procedures, or separate procedures to resolve sexual violence complaints. However, any procedures used for sexual violence complaints, including disciplinary procedures, must meet the Title IX requirement of affording a complainant a prompt and equitable resolution (as discussed in question C-5), including applying the preponderance of the evidence standard of review. As discussed in question C-5, the Title IX coordinator should review any process used to resolve complaints of sexual violence to ensure it complies with requirements for prompt and equitable resolution of these complaints. When using disciplinary procedures, which are often focused on the alleged perpetrator and can take considerable time, a school should be mindful of its obligation to provide interim measures to protect the complainant in the educational setting. For more information on timeframes and interim measures, see questions F-8 and G-1 to G-3.

#### **D. Responsible Employees and Reporting**<sup>22</sup>

D-1. Which school employees are obligated to report incidents of possible sexual violence to school officials?

Answer: Under Title IX, whether an individual is obligated to report incidents of alleged sexual violence generally depends on whether the individual is a responsible employee of the school. A responsible employee must report incidents of sexual violence to the Title IX coordinator or other appropriate school designee, subject to the exemption for school counseling employees discussed in question E-3. This is because, as discussed in question A-4, a school is obligated to address sexual violence about which a responsible employee knew or should have known. As explained in question C-3, the Title IX coordinator must be informed of all reports and complaints raising Title IX issues, even if the report or

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<sup>22</sup> This document addresses only Title IX's reporting requirements. It does not address requirements under the Clery Act or other federal, state, or local laws, or an individual school's code of conduct.

complaint was initially filed with another individual or office, subject to the exemption for school counseling employees discussed in question E-3.

D-1. Who is a "responsible employee"?

Answer: According to OCR's 2001 Guidance, a responsible employee includes any employee who has the authority to take action to redress sexual violence; who has been given the duty of reporting incidents of sexual violence or any other misconduct by students to the Title IX coordinator or other appropriate school designee; or whom a student could reasonably believe has this authority or duty.<sup>23</sup>

A school must make clear to all of its employees and students which staff members are responsible employees so that students can make informed decisions about whether to disclose information to those employees. A school must also inform all employees of their own reporting responsibilities and the importance of informing complainants of the reporting obligations of responsible employees; complainants' option to request confidentiality and available confidential advocacy, counseling, or other support services; and complainants' right to file a Title IX complaint with the school and to report a crime to campus or local law enforcement.

Whether an employee is a responsible employee will vary depending on factors such as the age and education level of the student, the type of position held by the employee, and consideration of both formal and informal school practices and procedures. For example, while it may be reasonable for an elementary school student to believe that a custodial staff member or cafeteria worker has the authority or responsibility to address student misconduct, it is less reasonable for a college student to believe that a custodial staff member or dining hall employee has this same authority.

As noted in response to question A-4, when a responsible employee knows or reasonably should know of possible sexual violence, OCR deems a school to have notice of the sexual violence. The school must take immediate and appropriate steps to investigate or otherwise determine what occurred (subject to the confidentiality provisions discussed in Section E), and, if the school determines that sexual violence created a hostile environment, the school must then take appropriate steps to address the situation. The

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<sup>23</sup> The Supreme Court held that a school will only be liable for money damages in a private lawsuit where there is actual notice to a school official with the authority to address the alleged discrimination and take corrective action. *Gebser v. Lago Vista Ind. Sch. Dist.*, 524 U.S. 274, 290 (1998), and *Davis*, 524 U.S. at 642. The concept of a "responsible employee" under OCR's guidance for administrative enforcement of Title IX is broader.

school has this obligation regardless of whether the student, student's parent, or a third party files a formal complaint. For additional information on a school's responsibilities to address student-on-student sexual violence, see question A-5. For additional information on training for school employees, see questions J-1 to J-3.

**D-6. What information is a responsible employee obligated to report about an incident of possible student-on-student sexual violence?**

**Answer:** Subject to the exemption for school counseling employees discussed in question E-3, a responsible employee must report to the school's Title IX coordinator, or other appropriate school designee, all relevant details about the alleged sexual violence that the student or another person has shared and that the school will need to determine what occurred and to resolve the situation. This includes the names of the alleged perpetrator (if known), the student who experienced the alleged sexual violence, other students involved in the alleged sexual violence, as well as relevant facts, including the date, time, and location. A school must make clear to its responsible employees to whom they should report an incident of alleged sexual violence.

To ensure compliance with these reporting obligations, it is important for a school to train its responsible employees on Title IX and the school's sexual violence policies and procedures. For more information on appropriate training for school employees, see question J-1 to J-3.

**D-4. What should a responsible employee tell a student who discloses an incident of sexual violence?**

**Answer:** Before a student reveals information that he or she may wish to keep confidential, a responsible employee should make every effort to ensure that the student understands: (i) the employee's obligation to report the names of the alleged perpetrator and student involved in the alleged sexual violence, as well as relevant facts regarding the alleged incident (including the date, time, and location), to the Title IX coordinator or other appropriate school officials, (ii) the student's option to request that the school maintain his or her confidentiality, which the school (e.g., Title IX coordinator) will consider, and (iii) the student's ability to share the information confidentially with counseling, advocacy, health, mental health, or sexual-assault-related services (e.g., sexual assault resource centers, campus health centers, pastoral counselors, and campus mental health centers). As discussed in questions E-1 and E-2, if the student requests confidentiality, the Title IX coordinator or other appropriate school designee responsible for evaluating requests for confidentiality should make every effort to respect this request.

and should evaluate the request in the context of the school's responsibility to provide a safe and nondiscriminatory environment for all students.

D-7. If a student informs a responsible employee (e.g., RA) that he or she was subjected to sexual violence, is the RA obligated under Title IX to report the incident to school officials?

Answer: As discussed in questions D-1 and D-2, for Title IX purposes, whether an individual is obligated under Title IX to report alleged sexual violence to the school's Title IX coordinator or other appropriate school designee generally depends on whether the individual is a responsible employee.

The duties and responsibilities of RAs vary among schools, and, therefore, a school should consider its own policies and procedures to determine whether its RAs are responsible employees who must report incidents of sexual violence to the Title IX coordinator or other appropriate school designee.<sup>24</sup> When making this determination, a school should consider if its RAs have the general authority to take action to redress misconduct or the duty to report misconduct to appropriate school officials, as well as whether students could reasonably believe that RAs have this authority or duty. A school should also consider whether it has determined and clearly informed students that RAs are generally available for confidential discussions and do not have the authority or responsibility to take action to redress any misconduct or to report any misconduct to the Title IX coordinator or other appropriate school officials. A school should pay particular attention to its RAs' obligations to report other student violations of school policy (e.g., drug and alcohol violations or physical assault). If an RA is required to report other misconduct that violates school policy, then the RA would be considered a responsible employee obligated to report incidents of sexual violence that violate school policy.

If an RA is a responsible employee, the RA should make every effort to ensure that *before* the student reveals information that he or she may wish to keep confidential, the student understands the RA's reporting obligation and the student's option to request that the school maintain confidentiality. It is therefore important that schools widely disseminate policies and provide regular training clearly identifying the places where students can seek confidential support services so that students are aware of this information. The RA

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<sup>24</sup> Postsecondary institutions should be aware that, regardless of whether an RA is a responsible employee under Title IX, RAs are considered "campus security authorities" under the Clery Act. A school's responsibilities in regard to crimes reported to campus security authorities are discussed in the Department's regulations on the Clery Act at 34 C.F.R. § 668.46.

should also explain to the student (again, before the student reveals information that he or she may wish to keep confidential) that, although the RA must report the names of the alleged perpetrator (if known), the student who experienced the alleged sexual violence, other students involved in the alleged sexual violence, as well as relevant facts, including the date, time, and location to the Title IX coordinator or other appropriate school designee, the school will protect the student's confidentiality to the greatest extent possible. Prior to providing information about the incident to the Title IX coordinator or other appropriate school designee, the RA should consult with the student about how to protect his or her safety and the details of what will be shared with the Title IX coordinator. The RA should explain to the student that reporting this information to the Title IX coordinator or other appropriate school designee does not necessarily mean that a formal complaint or investigation under the school's Title IX grievance procedure must be initiated if the student requests confidentiality. As discussed in questions E-1 and E-2, if the student requests confidentiality, the Title IX coordinator or other appropriate school designee responsible for evaluating requests for confidentiality should make every effort to respect this request and should evaluate the request in the context of the school's responsibility to provide a safe and nondiscriminatory environment for all students.

Regardless of whether a reporting obligation exists, all RAs should inform students of their right to file a Title IX complaint with the school and report a crime to campus or local law enforcement. If a student discloses sexual violence to an RA who is a responsible employee, the school will be deemed to have notice of the sexual violence even if the student does not file a Title IX complaint. Additionally, all RAs should provide students with information regarding on-campus resources, including victim advocacy, housing assistance, academic support, counseling, disability services, health and mental health services, and legal assistance. RAs should also be familiar with local rape crisis centers or other off-campus resources and provide this information to students.

#### **E. Confidentiality and a School's Obligation to Respond to Sexual Violence**

- E-1. How should a school respond to a student's request that his or her name not be disclosed to the alleged perpetrator or that no investigation or disciplinary action be pursued to address the alleged sexual violence?**

**Answer:** Students, or parents of minor students, reporting incidents of sexual violence sometimes ask that the students' names not be disclosed to the alleged perpetrators or that no investigation or disciplinary action be pursued to address the alleged sexual violence. OCR strongly supports a student's interest in confidentiality in cases involving sexual violence. There are situations in which a school must override a student's request

for confidentiality in order to meet its Title IX obligations; however, these instances will be limited and the information should only be shared with individuals who are responsible for handling the school's response to incidents of sexual violence. Given the sensitive nature of reports of sexual violence, a school should ensure that the information is maintained in a secure manner. A school should be aware that disregarding requests for confidentiality can have a chilling effect and discourage other students from reporting sexual violence. In the case of minors, state mandatory reporting laws may require disclosure, but can generally be followed without disclosing information to school personnel who are not responsible for handling the school's response to incidents of sexual violence.<sup>25</sup>

Even if a student does not specifically ask for confidentiality, to the extent possible, a school should only disclose information regarding alleged incidents of sexual violence to individuals who are responsible for handling the school's response. To improve trust in the process for investigating sexual violence complaints, a school should notify students of the information that will be disclosed, to whom it will be disclosed, and why. Regardless of whether a student complainant requests confidentiality, a school must take steps to protect the complainant as necessary, including taking interim measures before the final outcome of an investigation. For additional information on interim measures see questions G-1 to G-3.

For Title IX purposes, if a student requests that his or her name not be revealed to the alleged perpetrator or asks that the school not investigate or seek action against the alleged perpetrator, the school should inform the student that honoring the request may limit its ability to respond fully to the incident, including pursuing disciplinary action against the alleged perpetrator. The school should also explain that Title IX includes protections against retaliation, and that school officials will not only take steps to prevent retaliation but also take strong responsive action if it occurs. This includes retaliatory actions taken by the school and school officials. When a school knows or reasonably should know of possible retaliation by other students or third parties, including threats, intimidation, coercion, or discrimination (including harassment), it must take immediate

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<sup>25</sup> The school should be aware of the alleged student perpetrator's right under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA") to request to inspect and review information about the allegations if the information directly relates to the alleged student perpetrator and the information is maintained by the school as an education record. In such a case, the school must either redact the complainant's name and all identifying information before allowing the alleged perpetrator to inspect and review the sections of the complaint that relate to him or her, or must inform the alleged perpetrator of the specific information in the complaint that are about the alleged perpetrator. See 34 C.F.R. § 99.12(a). The school should also make complainants aware of this right and explain how it might affect the school's ability to maintain complete confidentiality.

and appropriate steps to investigate or otherwise determine what occurred. Title IX requires the school to protect the complainant and ensure his or her safety as necessary. See question X-1 regarding retaliation.

If the student still requests that his or her name not be disclosed to the alleged perpetrator or that the school not investigate or seek action against the alleged perpetrator, the school will need to determine whether or not it can honor such a request while still providing a safe and nondiscriminatory environment for all students, including the student who reported the sexual violence. As discussed in question C-3, the Title IX coordinator is generally in the best position to evaluate confidentiality requests. Because schools vary widely in size and administrative structure, OCR recognizes that a school may reasonably determine that an employee other than the Title IX coordinator, such as a sexual assault response coordinator, dean, or other school official, is better suited to evaluate such requests. Addressing the needs of a student reporting sexual violence while determining an appropriate institutional response requires expertise and attention, and a school should ensure that it assigns these responsibilities to employees with the capability and training to fulfill them. For example, if a school has a sexual assault response coordinator, that person should be consulted in evaluating requests for confidentiality. The school should identify in its Title IX policies and procedures the employee or employees responsible for making such determinations.

If the school determines that it can respect the student's request not to disclose his or her identity to the alleged perpetrator, it should take all reasonable steps to respond to the complaint consistent with the request. Although a student's request to have his or her name withheld may limit the school's ability to respond fully to an individual allegation of sexual violence, other means may be available to address the sexual violence. There are steps a school can take to limit the effects of the alleged sexual violence and prevent its recurrence without initiating formal action against the alleged perpetrator or revealing the identity of the student complainant. Examples include providing increased monitoring, supervision, or security at locations or activities where the misconduct occurred; providing training and education materials for students and employees; changing and publicizing the school's policies on sexual violence; and conducting climate surveys regarding sexual violence. In instances affecting many students, an alleged perpetrator can be put on notice of allegations of harassing behavior and be counseled appropriately without revealing, even indirectly, the identity of the student complainant. A school must also take immediate action as necessary to protect the student while keeping the identity of the student confidential. These actions may include providing support services to the student and changing living arrangements or course schedules, assignments, or tests.

**E-2. What factors should a school consider in weighing a student's request for confidentiality?**

When weighing a student's request for confidentiality that could preclude a meaningful investigation or potential discipline of the alleged perpetrator, a school should consider a range of factors.

These factors include circumstances that suggest there is an increased risk of the alleged perpetrator committing additional acts of sexual violence or other violence (e.g., whether there have been other sexual violence complaints about the same alleged perpetrator, whether the alleged perpetrator has a history of arrests or records from a prior school indicating a history of violence, whether the alleged perpetrator threatened further sexual violence or other violence against the student or others, and whether the sexual violence was committed by multiple perpetrators). These factors also include circumstances that suggest there is an increased risk of future acts of sexual violence under similar circumstances (e.g., whether the student's report reveals a pattern of perpetration (e.g., via illicit use of drugs or alcohol) at a given location or by a particular group). Other factors that should be considered in assessing a student's request for confidentiality include whether the sexual violence was perpetrated with a weapon; the age of the student subjected to the sexual violence; and whether the school possesses other means to obtain relevant evidence (e.g., security cameras or personnel, physical evidence).

A school should take requests for confidentiality seriously, while at the same time considering its responsibility to provide a safe and nondiscriminatory environment for all students, including the student who reported the sexual violence. For example, if the school has credible information that the alleged perpetrator has committed one or more prior rapes, the balance of factors would compel the school to investigate the allegation of sexual violence, and if appropriate, pursue disciplinary action in a manner that may require disclosure of the student's identity to the alleged perpetrator. If the school determines that it must disclose a student's identity to an alleged perpetrator, it should inform the student prior to making this disclosure. In these cases, it is also especially important for schools to take whatever interim measures are necessary to protect the student and ensure the safety of other students. If a school has a sexual assault response coordinator, that person should be consulted in identifying safety risks and interim measures that are necessary to protect the student. In the event the student requests that the school inform the perpetrator that the student asked the school not to investigate or seek discipline, the school should honor this request and inform the alleged perpetrator that the school made the decision to go forward. For additional information on interim measures see questions G-1 to G-3. Any school officials responsible for



discussing safety and confidentiality with students should be trained on the effects of trauma and the appropriate methods to communicate with students subjected to sexual violence. See questions J-1 to J-3.

On the other hand, if, for example, the school has no credible information about prior sexual violence committed by the alleged perpetrator and the alleged sexual violence was not perpetrated with a weapon or accompanied by threats to repeat the sexual violence against the complainant or others or part of a larger pattern at a given location or by a particular group, the balance of factors would likely compel the school to respect the student's request for confidentiality. In this case the school should still take all reasonable steps to respond to the complaint consistent with the student's confidentiality request and determine whether interim measures are appropriate or necessary. Schools should be mindful that traumatic events such as sexual violence can result in delayed decisionmaking by a student who has experienced sexual violence. Hence, a student who initially requests confidentiality might later request that a full investigation be conducted.

- J-3. What are the reporting responsibilities of school employees who provide or support the provision of counseling, advocacy, health, mental health, or sexual assault-related services to students who have experienced sexual violence?

Answer: OCR does not require campus mental-health counselors, pastoral counselors, social workers, psychologists, health center employees, or any other person with a professional license requiring confidentiality, or who is supervised by such a person, to report, without the student's consent, incidents of sexual violence to the school in a way that identifies the student. Although these employees may have responsibilities that would otherwise make them responsible employees for Title IX purposes, OCR recognizes the importance of protecting the counselor-client relationship, which often requires confidentiality to ensure that students will seek the help they need.

Professional counselors and pastoral counselors whose official responsibilities include providing mental-health counseling to members of the school community are not required by Title IX to report *any* information regarding an incident of alleged sexual violence to the Title IX coordinator or other appropriate school designee.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The exemption from reporting obligations for pastoral and professional counselors under Title IX is consistent with the Clery Act. For additional information on reporting obligations under the Clery Act, see Office of Postsecondary Education, *Handbook for Campus Safety and Security Reporting* (2011), available at <http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/handbook.pdf>. Similar to the Clery Act, for Title IX purposes, a pastoral counselor is a person who is associated with a religious order or denomination, is recognized by that religious

OCR recognizes that some people who provide assistance to students who experience sexual violence are not professional or pastoral counselors. They include all individuals who work or volunteer in on-campus sexual assault centers, victim advocacy offices, women's centers, or health centers ("non-professional counselors or advocates"), including front desk staff and students. OCR wants students to feel free to seek their assistance and therefore interprets Title IX to give schools the latitude not to require these individuals to report incidents of sexual violence in a way that identifies the student without the student's consent.<sup>27</sup> These non-professional counselors or advocates are valuable sources of support for students, and OCR strongly encourages schools to designate these individuals as confidential sources.

Pastoral and professional counselors and non-professional counselors or advocates should be instructed to inform students of their right to file a Title IX complaint with the school and a separate complaint with campus or local law enforcement. In addition to informing students about campus resources for counseling, medical, and academic support, these persons should also indicate that they are available to assist students in filing such complaints. They should also explain that Title IX includes protections against retaliation, and that school officials will not only take steps to prevent retaliation but also take strong responsive action if it occurs. This includes retaliatory actions taken by the school and school officials. When a school knows or reasonably should know of possible retaliation by other students or third parties, including threats, intimidation, coercion, or discrimination (including harassment), it must take immediate and appropriate steps to investigate or otherwise determine what occurred. Title IX requires the school to protect the complainant and ensure his or her safety as necessary.

In order to identify patterns or systemic problems related to sexual violence, a school should collect aggregate data about sexual violence incidents from non-professional counselors or advocates in their on-campus sexual assault centers, women's centers, or

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order or denomination as someone who provides confidential counseling, and is functioning within the scope of that recognition as a pastoral counselor. A professional counselor is a person whose official responsibilities include providing mental health counseling to members of the institution's community and who is functioning within the scope of his or her license or certification. This definition applies even to professional counselors who are not employees of the school, but are under contract to provide counseling at the school. This includes individuals who are not yet licensed or certified as a counselor, but are acting in that role under the supervision of an individual who is licensed or certified. An example is a Ph.D. counselor-trainee acting under the supervision of a professional counselor at the school.

<sup>27</sup> Postsecondary institutions should be aware that an individual who is counseling students, but who does not meet the Clery Act definition of a pastoral or professional counselor, is not exempt from being a campus security authority if he or she otherwise has significant responsibility for student and campus activities. See fn. 24.

health centers. Such individuals should report only general information about incidents of sexual violence such as the nature, date, time, and general location of the incident and should take care to avoid reporting personally identifiable information about a student. Non-professional counselors and advocates should consult with students regarding what information needs to be withheld to protect their identity.

- E-4. Is a school required to investigate information regarding sexual violence incidents shared by survivors during public awareness events, such as "Take Back the Night"?

Answer: No. OCR wants students to feel free to participate in preventive education programs and access resources for survivors. Therefore, public awareness events such as "Take Back the Night" or other forums at which students disclose experiences with sexual violence are not considered notice to the school for the purpose of triggering an individual investigation unless the survivor initiates a complaint. The school should instead respond to these disclosures by reviewing sexual assault policies, creating campus-wide educational programs, and conducting climate surveys to learn more about the prevalence of sexual violence at the school. Although Title IX does not require the school to investigate particular incidents discussed at such events, the school should ensure that survivors are aware of any available resources, including counseling, health, and mental health services. To ensure that the entire school community understands their Title IX rights related to sexual violence, the school should also provide information at these events on Title IX and how to file a Title IX complaint with the school, as well as options for reporting an incident of sexual violence to campus or local law enforcement.

## **F. Investigations and Hearings**

### **Overview**

- F-1. What elements should a school's Title IX investigation include?

Answer: The specific steps in a school's Title IX investigation will vary depending on the nature of the allegation, the age of the student or students involved, the size and administrative structure of the school, state or local legal requirements (including mandatory reporting requirements for schools working with minors), and what it has learned from past experiences.

For the purposes of this document the term "investigation" refers to the process the school uses to resolve sexual violence complaints. This includes the fact-finding investigation and any hearing and decision-making process the school uses to determine: (1) whether or not the conduct occurred; and, (2) if the conduct occurred, what actions

the school will take to end the sexual violence, eliminate the hostile environment, and prevent its recurrence, which may include imposing sanctions on the perpetrator and providing remedies for the complainant and broader student population.

In all cases, a school's Title IX investigation must be adequate, reliable, impartial, and prompt and include the opportunity for both parties to present witnesses and other evidence. The investigation may include a hearing to determine whether the conduct occurred, but Title IX does not necessarily require a hearing.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, neither Title IX nor the DCL specifies who should conduct the investigation. It could be the Title IX coordinator, provided there are no conflicts of interest, but it does not have to be. All persons involved in conducting a school's Title IX investigations must have training or experience in handling complaints of sexual violence and in the school's grievance procedures. For additional information on training, see question J-3.

When investigating an incident of alleged sexual violence for Title IX purposes, to the extent possible, a school should coordinate with any other ongoing school or criminal investigations of the incident and establish appropriate fact-finding roles for each investigator. A school should also consider whether information can be shared among the investigators so that complainants are not unnecessarily required to give multiple statements about a traumatic event. If the investigation includes forensic evidence, it may be helpful for a school to consult with local or campus law enforcement or a forensic expert to ensure that the evidence is correctly interpreted by school officials. For additional information on working with campus or local law enforcement see question F-3.

If a school uses its student disciplinary procedures to meet its Title IX obligation to resolve complaints of sexual violence promptly and equitably, it should recognize that imposing sanctions against the perpetrator, without additional remedies, likely will not be sufficient to eliminate the hostile environment and prevent recurrence as required by Title IX. If a school typically processes complaints of sexual violence through its disciplinary process and that process, including any investigation and hearing, meets the Title IX requirements discussed above and enables the school to end the sexual violence, eliminate the hostile environment, and prevent its recurrence, then the school may use that process to satisfy its Title IX obligations and does not need to conduct a separate Title IX investigation. As discussed in question C-3, the Title IX coordinator should review the disciplinary process

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<sup>28</sup> This answer addresses only Title IX's requirements for investigations. It does not address legal rights or requirements under the U.S. Constitution, the Clery Act, or other federal, state, or local laws.

to ensure that it: (1) complies with the prompt and equitable requirements of Title IX; (2) allows for appropriate interim measures to be taken to protect the complainant during the process; and (3) provides for remedies to the complainant and school community where appropriate. For more information about interim measures, see questions G-1 to G-6, and about remedies, see questions H-1 and H-2.

The investigation may include, but is not limited to, conducting interviews of the complainant, the alleged perpetrator, and any witnesses; reviewing law enforcement investigation documents, if applicable; reviewing student and personnel files; and gathering and examining other relevant documents or evidence. While a school has flexibility in how it structures the investigative process, for Title IX purposes, a school must give the complainant any rights that it gives to the alleged perpetrator. A balanced and fair process that provides the same opportunities to both parties will lead to sound and supportable decisions.<sup>29</sup> Specifically,

Throughout the investigation, the parties must have an equal opportunity to present relevant witnesses and other evidence.

- The school must use a preponderance-of-the-evidence (*i.e.*, more likely than not) standard in any Title IX proceedings, including any fact-finding and hearings.
- If the school permits one party to have lawyers or other advisors at any stage of the proceedings, it must do so equally for both parties. Any school-imposed restrictions on the ability of lawyers or other advisors to speak or otherwise participate in the proceedings must also apply equally.
- If the school permits one party to submit third-party expert testimony, it must do so equally for both parties.
- If the school provides for an appeal, it must do so equally for both parties.
- Both parties must be notified, in writing, of the outcome of both the complaint and any appeal (see question H-3).

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<sup>29</sup> As explained in question C-5, the parties may have certain due process rights under the U.S. Constitution.

### Intersection with Criminal Investigations

F-2. What are the key differences between a school's Title IX investigation into allegations of sexual violence and a criminal investigation?

Answer: A criminal investigation is intended to determine whether an individual violated criminal law; and, if at the conclusion of the investigation, the individual is tried and found guilty, the individual may be imprisoned or subject to criminal penalties. The U.S. Constitution affords criminal defendants who face the risk of incarceration numerous protections, including, but not limited to, the right to counsel, the right to a speedy trial, the right to a jury trial, the right against self-incrimination, and the right to confrontation. In addition, government officials responsible for criminal investigations (including police and prosecutors) normally have discretion as to which complaints from the public they will investigate.

By contrast, a Title IX investigation will never result in incarceration of an individual and, therefore, the same procedural protections and legal standards are not required. Further, while a criminal investigation is initiated at the discretion of law enforcement authorities, a Title IX investigation is not discretionary; a school has a duty under Title IX to resolve complaints promptly and equitably and to provide a safe and nondiscriminatory environment for all students, free from sexual harassment and sexual violence. Because the standards for pursuing and completing criminal investigations are different from those used for Title IX investigations, the termination of a criminal investigation without an arrest or conviction does not affect the school's Title IX obligations.

Of course, criminal investigations conducted by local or campus law enforcement may be useful for fact gathering if the criminal investigation occurs within the recommended timeframe for Title IX investigations; but, even if a criminal investigation is ongoing, a school must still conduct its own Title IX investigation.

A school should notify complainants of the right to file a criminal complaint and should not dissuade a complainant from doing so either during or after the school's internal Title IX investigation. Title IX does not require a school to report alleged incidents of sexual violence to law enforcement, but a school may have reporting obligations under state, local, or other federal laws.

**F-3. How should a school proceed when campus or local law enforcement agencies are conducting a criminal investigation while the school is conducting a parallel Title IX investigation?**

Although a school should not wait for the conclusion of a criminal investigation or criminal proceeding to begin its own Title IX investigation. Although a school may need to delay temporarily the fact-finding portion of a Title IX investigation while the police are gathering evidence, it is important for a school to understand that during this brief delay in the Title IX investigation, it must take interim measures to protect the complainant in the educational setting. The school should also continue to update the parties on the status of the investigation and inform the parties when the school resumes its Title IX investigation. For additional information on interim measures see questions G-1 to G-3.

If a school delays the fact-finding portion of a Title IX investigation, the school must promptly resume and complete its fact-finding for the Title IX investigation once it learns that the police department has completed its evidence gathering stage of the criminal investigation. The school should not delay its investigation until the ultimate outcome of the criminal investigation or the filing of any charges. OCR recommends that a school work with its campus police, local law enforcement, and local prosecutor's office to learn when the evidence gathering stage of the criminal investigation is complete. A school may also want to enter into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) or other agreement with these agencies regarding the protocols and procedures for referring allegations of sexual violence, sharing information, and conducting contemporaneous investigations. Any MOU or other agreement must allow the school to meet its Title IX obligation to resolve complaints promptly and equitably, and must comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA") and other applicable privacy laws.

The DCL states that in one instance a prosecutor's office informed OCR that the police department's evidence gathering stage typically takes three to ten calendar days, although the delay in the school's investigation may be longer in certain instances. OCR understands that this example may not be representative and that the law enforcement agency's process often takes more than ten days. OCR recognizes that the length of time for evidence gathering by criminal investigators will vary depending on the specific circumstances of each case.

### Off-Campus Conduct

F-4. Is a school required to process complaints of alleged sexual violence that occurred off campus?

*Answer:* Yes. Under Title IX, a school must process all complaints of sexual violence, regardless of where the conduct occurred, to determine whether the conduct occurred in the context of an education program or activity or had continuing effects on campus or in an off-campus education program or activity.

A school must determine whether the alleged off-campus sexual violence occurred in the context of an education program or activity of the school; if so, the school must treat the complaint in the same manner that it treats complaints regarding on-campus conduct. In other words, if a school determines that the alleged misconduct took place in the context of an education program or activity of the school, the fact that the alleged misconduct took place off campus does not relieve the school of its obligation to investigate the complaint as it would investigate a complaint of sexual violence that occurred on campus.

Whether the alleged misconduct occurred in this context may not always be apparent from the complaint, so a school may need to gather additional information in order to make such a determination. Off-campus education programs and activities are clearly covered and include, but are not limited to: activities that take place at houses of fraternities or sororities recognized by the school; school-sponsored field trips, including athletic team travel; and events for school clubs that occur off campus (e.g., a debate team trip to another school or to a weekend competition).

Even if the misconduct did not occur in the context of an education program or activity, a school must consider the effects of the off-campus misconduct when evaluating whether there is a hostile environment on campus or in an off-campus education program or activity because students often experience the continuing effects of off-campus sexual violence while at school or in an off-campus education program or activity. The school cannot address the continuing effects of the off-campus sexual violence at school or in an off-campus education program or activity unless it processes the complaint and gathers appropriate additional information in accordance with its established procedures.

Once a school is on notice of off-campus sexual violence against a student, it must assess whether there are any continuing effects on campus or in an off-campus education program or activity that are creating or contributing to a hostile environment and, if so, address that hostile environment in the same manner in which it would address a hostile environment created by on-campus misconduct. The mere presence on campus or in an



off-campus education program or activity of the alleged perpetrator of off-campus sexual violence can have continuing effects that create a hostile environment. A school should also take steps to protect a student who alleges off-campus sexual violence from further harassment by the alleged perpetrator or his or her friends, and a school may have to take steps to protect other students from possible assault by the alleged perpetrator. In other words, the school should protect the school community in the same way it would had the sexual violence occurred on campus. Even if there are no continuing effects of the off-campus sexual violence experienced by the student on campus or in an off-campus education program or activity, the school still should handle these incidents as it would handle other off-campus incidents of misconduct or violence and consistent with any other applicable laws. For example, if a school, under its code of conduct, exercises jurisdiction over physical altercations between students that occur off campus outside of an education program or activity, it should also exercise jurisdiction over incidents of student-on-student sexual violence that occur off campus outside of an education program or activity.

#### Hearings<sup>30</sup>

F-5. Must a school allow or require the parties to be present during an entire hearing?

Answer: If a school uses a hearing process to determine responsibility for acts of sexual violence, OCR does not require that the school allow a complainant to be present for the entire hearing; it is up to each school to make this determination. But if the school allows one party to be present for the entirety of a hearing, it must do so equally for both parties. At the same time, when requested, a school should make arrangements so that the complainant and the alleged perpetrator do not have to be present in the same room at the same time. These two objectives may be achieved by using closed circuit television or other means. Because a school has a Title IX obligation to investigate possible sexual violence, if a hearing is part of the school's Title IX investigation process, the school must not require a complainant to be present at the hearing as a prerequisite to proceed with the hearing.

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<sup>30</sup> As noted in question F-1, the investigation may include a hearing to determine whether the conduct occurred, but Title IX does not necessarily require a hearing. Although Title IX does not dictate the membership of a hearing board, OCR discourages schools from allowing students to serve on hearing boards in cases involving allegations of sexual violence.

**F-6. May every witness at the hearing, including the parties, be cross-examined?**

**Answer:** OCR does not require that a school allow cross-examination of witnesses, including the parties, if they testify at the hearing. But if the school allows one party to cross-examine witnesses, it must do so equally for both parties.

OCR strongly discourages a school from allowing the parties to personally question or cross-examine each other during a hearing on alleged sexual violence. Allowing an alleged perpetrator to question a complainant directly may be traumatic or intimidating, and may perpetuate a hostile environment. A school may choose, instead, to allow the parties to submit questions to a trained third party (e.g., the hearing panel) to ask the questions on their behalf. OCR recommends that the third party screen the questions submitted by the parties and only ask those it deems appropriate and relevant to the case.

**F-7. May the complainant's sexual history be introduced at hearings?**

**Answer:** Questioning about the complainant's sexual history with anyone other than the alleged perpetrator should not be permitted. Further, a school should recognize that the mere fact of a current or previous consensual dating or sexual relationship between the two parties does not itself imply consent or preclude a finding of sexual violence. The school should also ensure that hearings are conducted in a manner that does not inflict additional trauma on the complainant.

**Timeframes**

**F-8. What stages of the investigation are included in the 60-day timeframe referenced in the DCL as the length for a typical investigation?**

**Answer:** As noted in the DCL, the 60-calendar day timeframe for investigations is based on OCR's experience in typical cases. The 60-calendar day timeframe refers to the entire investigation process, which includes conducting the fact-finding investigation, holding a hearing or engaging in another decision-making process to determine whether the alleged sexual violence occurred and created a hostile environment, and determining what actions the school will take to eliminate the hostile environment and prevent its recurrence, including imposing sanctions against the perpetrator and providing remedies for the complainant and school community, as appropriate. Although this timeframe does not include appeals, a school should be aware that an unduly long appeals process may impact whether the school's response was prompt and equitable as required by Title IX.

OCR does not require a school to complete investigations within 60 days; rather OCR evaluates on a case-by-case basis whether the resolution of sexual violence complaints is prompt and equitable. Whether OCR considers an investigation to be prompt as required by Title IX will vary depending on the complexity of the investigation and the severity and extent of the alleged conduct. OCR recognizes that the investigation process may take longer if there is a parallel criminal investigation or if it occurs partially during school breaks. A school may need to stop an investigation during school breaks or between school years, although a school should make every effort to try to conduct an investigation during these breaks unless so doing would sacrifice witness availability or otherwise compromise the process.

Because timeframes for investigations vary and a school may need to depart from the timeframes designated in its grievance procedures, both parties should be given periodic status updates throughout the process.

### 6. Interim Measures

#### 6-1. Is a school required to take any interim measures before the completion of its investigation?

Answer: Title IX requires a school to take steps to ensure equal access to its education programs and activities and protect the complainant as necessary, including taking interim measures before the final outcome of an investigation. The school should take these steps promptly once it has notice of a sexual violence allegation and should provide the complainant with periodic updates on the status of the investigation. The school should notify the complainant of his or her options to avoid contact with the alleged perpetrator and allow the complainant to change academic and extracurricular activities or his or her living, transportation, dining, and working situation as appropriate. The school should also ensure that the complainant is aware of his or her Title IX rights and any available resources, such as victim advocacy, housing assistance, academic support, counseling, disability services, health and mental health services, and legal assistance, and the right to report a crime to campus or local law enforcement. If a school does not offer these services on campus, it should enter into an MOU with a local victim services provider if possible.

Even when a school has determined that it can respect a complainant's request for confidentiality and therefore may not be able to respond fully to an allegation of sexual violence and initiate formal action against an alleged perpetrator, the school must take immediate action to protect the complainant while keeping the identity of the complainant confidential. These actions may include: providing support services to the

complainant; changing living arrangements or course schedules, assignments, or tests; and providing increased monitoring, supervision, or security at locations or activities where the misconduct occurred.

**G-2. How can a school determine what interim measures to take?**

**Answer:** The specific interim measures implemented and the process for implementing those measures will vary depending on the facts of each case. A school should consider a number of factors in determining what interim measures to take, including, for example, the specific need expressed by the complainant; the age of the students involved; the severity or pervasiveness of the allegations; any continuing effects on the complainant; whether the complainant and alleged perpetrator share the same residence hall, dining hall, class, transportation, or job location; and whether other judicial measures have been taken to protect the complainant (e.g., civil protection orders).

In general, when taking interim measures, schools should minimize the burden on the complainant. For example, if the complainant and alleged perpetrator share the same class or residence hall, the school should not, as a matter of course, remove the complainant from the class or housing while allowing the alleged perpetrator to remain without carefully considering the facts of the case.

**G-3. If a school provides all students with access to counseling on a fee basis, does that suffice for providing counseling as an interim measure?**

**Answer:** No. Interim measures are determined by a school on a case-by-case basis. If a school determines that it needs to offer counseling to the complainant as part of its Title IX obligation to take steps to protect the complainant while the investigation is ongoing, it must not require the complainant to pay for this service.

## H. Remedies and Notice of Outcome<sup>31</sup>

H-1. What remedies should a school consider in a case of student-on-student sexual violence?

Answer: Effective remedial action may include disciplinary action against the perpetrator, providing counseling for the perpetrator, remedies for the complainant and others, as well as changes to the school's overall services or policies. All services needed to remedy the hostile environment should be offered to the complainant. These remedies are separate from, and in addition to, any interim measure that may have been provided prior to the conclusion of the school's investigation. In any instance in which the complainant did not take advantage of a specific service (e.g., counseling) when offered as an interim measure, the complainant should still be offered, and is still entitled to, appropriate final remedies that may include services the complainant declined as an interim measure. A refusal at the interim stage does not mean the refused service or set of services should not be offered as a remedy.

If a school uses its student disciplinary procedures to meet its Title IX obligation to resolve complaints of sexual violence promptly and equitably, it should recognize that imposing sanctions against the perpetrator, without more, likely will not be sufficient to satisfy its Title IX obligation to eliminate the hostile environment, prevent its recurrence, and, as appropriate, remedy its effects. Additional remedies for the complainant and the school community may be necessary. If the school's student disciplinary procedure does not include a process for determining and implementing these remedies for the complainant and school community, the school will need to use another process for this purpose.

Depending on the specific nature of the problem, remedies for the complainant may include, but are not limited to:

- Providing an effective escort to ensure that the complainant can move safely between classes and activities;

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<sup>31</sup> As explained in question A-5, if a school delays responding to allegations of sexual violence or responds inappropriately, the school's own inaction may subject the student to be subjected to a hostile environment. In this case, in addition to the remedies discussed in this section, the school will also be required to remedy the effects of the sexual violence that could reasonably have been prevented had the school responded promptly and appropriately.

- Ensuring the complainant and perpetrator do not share classes or extracurricular activities;
- Moving the perpetrator or complainant (if the complainant requests to be moved) to a different residence hall or, in the case of an elementary or secondary school student, to another school within the district;
- Providing comprehensive, holistic victim services including medical, counseling and academic support services, such as tutoring;
- Arranging for the complainant to have extra time to complete or re-take a class or withdraw from a class without an academic or financial penalty; and
- Reviewing any disciplinary actions taken against the complainant to see if there is a causal connection between the sexual violence and the misconduct that may have resulted in the complainant being disciplined.<sup>32</sup>

Remedies for the broader student population may include, but are not limited to:

- Designating an individual from the school's counseling center who is specifically trained in providing trauma-informed comprehensive services to victims of sexual violence to be on call to assist students whenever needed;
- Training or retraining school employees on the school's responsibilities to address allegations of sexual violence and how to conduct Title IX investigations;
- Developing materials on sexual violence, which should be distributed to all students;
- Conducting bystander intervention and sexual violence prevention programs with students;
- Issuing policy statements or taking other steps that clearly communicate that the school does not tolerate sexual violence and will respond to any incidents and to any student who reports such incidents;

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<sup>32</sup> For example, if the complainant was disciplined for skipping a class in which the perpetrator was enrolled, the school should review the incident to determine if the complainant skipped class to avoid contact with the perpetrator.

- Conducting, in conjunction with student leaders, a campus climate check to assess the effectiveness of efforts to ensure that the school is free from sexual violence, and using that information to inform future proactive steps that the school will take;
- Targeted training for a group of students if, for example, the sexual violence created a hostile environment in a residence hall, fraternity or sorority, or on an athletic team; and
- Developing a protocol for working with local law enforcement as discussed in question F-3.

When a school is unable to conduct a full investigation into a particular incident (*i.e.*, when it received a general report of sexual violence without any personally identifying information), it should consider remedies for the broader student population in response.

**H-2** If, after an investigation, a school finds the alleged perpetrator responsible and determines that, as part of the remedies for the complainant, it must separate the complainant and perpetrator, how should the school accomplish this if both students share the same major and there are limited course options?

**Answer:** If there are limited sections of required courses offered at a school and both the complainant and perpetrator are required to take those classes, the school may need to make alternate arrangements in a manner that minimizes the burden on the complainant. For example, the school may allow the complainant to take the regular sections of the courses while arranging for the perpetrator to take the same courses online or through independent study.

**H-3.** What information must be provided to the complainant in the notice of the outcome?

**Answer:** Title IX requires both parties to be notified, in writing, about the outcome of both the complaint and any appeal. OCR recommends that a school provide written notice of the outcome to the complainant and the alleged perpetrator concurrently.

For Title IX purposes, a school must inform the complainant as to whether or not it found that the alleged conduct occurred, any individual remedies offered or provided to the complainant or any sanctions imposed on the perpetrator that directly relate to the complainant, and other steps the school has taken to eliminate the hostile environment, if the school finds one to exist, and prevent recurrence. The perpetrator should not be notified of the individual remedies offered or provided to the complainant.

Sanctions that directly relate to the complainant (but that may also relate to eliminating the hostile environment and preventing recurrence) include, but are not limited to, requiring that the perpetrator stay away from the complainant until both parties graduate, prohibiting the perpetrator from attending school for a period of time, or transferring the perpetrator to another residence hall, other classes, or another school. Additional steps the school has taken to eliminate the hostile environment may include counseling and academic support services for the complainant and other affected students. Additional steps the school has taken to prevent recurrence may include sexual violence training for faculty and staff, revisions to the school's policies on sexual violence, and campus climate surveys. Further discussion of appropriate remedies is included in question H-1.

In addition to the Title IX requirements described above, the Clery Act requires, and FERPA permits, postsecondary institutions to inform the complainant of the institution's final determination and any disciplinary sanctions imposed on the perpetrator in sexual violence cases (as opposed to all harassment and misconduct covered by Title IX) not just those sanctions that directly relate to the complainant.<sup>33</sup>

## I. Appeals

### I-1. What are the requirements for an appeals process?

**Answer:** While Title IX does not require that a school provide an appeals process, OCR does recommend that the school do so where procedural error or previously unavailable relevant evidence could significantly impact the outcome of a case or where a sanction is substantially disproportionate to the findings. If a school chooses to provide for an appeal of the findings or remedy or both, it must do so equally for both parties. The specific design of the appeals process is up to the school, as long as the entire grievance process, including any appeals, provides prompt and equitable resolutions of sexual violence complaints, and the school takes steps to protect the complainant in the educational setting during the process. Any individual or body handling appeals should be trained in the dynamics of and trauma associated with sexual violence.

If a school chooses to offer an appeals process it has flexibility to determine the type of review it will apply to appeals, but the type of review the school applies must be the same regardless of which party files the appeal.

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<sup>33</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 1092(f) and 20 U.S.C. § 1232g(b)(6)(A).



- I-2. Must an appeal be available to a complainant who receives a favorable finding but does not believe a sanction that directly relates to him or her was sufficient?

Answer: The appeals process must be equal for both parties. For example, if a school allows a perpetrator to appeal a suspension on the grounds that it is too severe, the school must also allow a complainant to appeal a suspension on the grounds that it was not severe enough. See question H-3 for more information on what must be provided to the complainant in the notice of the outcome.

J. Title IX Training, Education and Prevention<sup>34</sup>

- J-1. What type of training on Title IX and sexual violence should a school provide to its employees?

Answer: A school needs to ensure that responsible employees with the authority to address sexual violence know how to respond appropriately to reports of sexual violence, that other responsible employees know that they are obligated to report sexual violence to appropriate school officials, and that all other employees understand how to respond to reports of sexual violence. A school should ensure that professional counselors, pastoral counselors, and non-professional counselors or advocates also understand the extent to which they may keep a report confidential. A school should provide training to all employees likely to witness or receive reports of sexual violence, including teachers, professors, school law enforcement unit employees, school administrators, school counselors, general counsels, athletic coaches, health personnel, and resident advisors. Training for employees should include practical information about how to prevent and identify sexual violence, including same-sex sexual violence; the behaviors that may lead to and result in sexual violence; the attitudes of bystanders that may allow conduct to continue; the potential for revictimization by responders and its effect on students; appropriate methods for responding to a student who may have experienced sexual violence, including the use of nonjudgmental language; the impact of trauma on victims; and, as applicable, the person(s) to whom such misconduct must be reported. The training should also explain responsible employees' reporting obligation, including what should be included in a report and any consequences for the failure to report and the procedure for responding to students' requests for confidentiality, as well as provide the contact

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<sup>34</sup> As explained earlier, although this document focuses on sexual violence, the legal principles apply to other forms of sexual harassment. Schools should ensure that any training they provide on Title IX and sexual violence also covers other forms of sexual harassment. Postsecondary institutions should also be aware of training requirements imposed under the Clery Act.

information for the school's Title IX coordinator. A school also should train responsible employees to inform students of: the reporting obligations of responsible employees; students' option to request confidentiality and available confidential advocacy, counseling, or other support services; and their right to file a Title IX complaint with the school and to report a crime to campus or local law enforcement. For additional information on the reporting obligations of responsible employees and others see questions D-1 to D-5.

There is no minimum number of hours required for Title IX and sexual violence training at every school, but this training should be provided on a regular basis. Each school should determine based on its particular circumstances how such training should be conducted, who has the relevant expertise required to conduct the training, and who should receive the training to ensure that the training adequately prepares employees, particularly responsible employees, to fulfill their duties under Title IX. A school should also have methods for verifying that the training was effective.

**J-2. How should a school train responsible employees to report incidents of possible sexual harassment or sexual violence?**

**Answer:** Title IX requires a school to take prompt and effective steps reasonably calculated to end sexual harassment and sexual violence that creates a hostile environment (*i.e.*, conduct that is sufficiently serious as to limit or deny a student's ability to participate in or benefit from the school's educational program and activity). But a school should not wait to take steps to protect its students until students have already been deprived of educational opportunities.

OCR therefore recommends that a school train responsible employees to report to the Title IX coordinator or other appropriate school official any incidents of sexual harassment or sexual violence that may violate the school's code of conduct or may create or contribute to the creation of a hostile environment. The school can then take steps to investigate and prevent any harassment or violence from recurring or escalating, as appropriate. For example, the school may separate the complainant and alleged perpetrator or conduct sexual harassment and sexual violence training for the school's students and employees. Responsible employees should understand that they do not need to determine whether the alleged sexual harassment or sexual violence actually occurred or that a hostile environment has been created before reporting an incident to the school's Title IX coordinator. Because the Title IX coordinator should have in-depth knowledge of Title IX and Title IX complaints at the school, he or she is likely to be in a better position than are other employees to evaluate whether an incident of sexual

harassment or sexual violence creates a hostile environment and how the school should respond. There may also be situations in which individual incidents of sexual harassment do not, by themselves, create a hostile environment; however when considered together, those incidents may create a hostile environment.

- 4-B. What type of training should a school provide to employees who are involved in implementing the school's grievance procedures?

Answer: All persons involved in implementing a school's grievance procedures (e.g., Title IX coordinators, others who receive complaints, investigators, and adjudicators) must have training or experience in handling sexual violence complaints, and in the operation of the school's grievance procedures. The training should include information on working with and interviewing persons subjected to sexual violence; information on particular types of conduct that would constitute sexual violence, including same-sex sexual violence; the proper standard of review for sexual violence complaints (preponderance of the evidence); information on consent and the role drugs or alcohol can play in the ability to consent; the importance of accountability for individuals found to have committed sexual violence; the need for remedial actions for the perpetrator, complainant, and school community; how to determine credibility; how to evaluate evidence and weigh it in an impartial manner; how to conduct investigations; confidentiality; the effects of trauma, including neurobiological change; and cultural awareness training regarding how sexual violence may impact students differently depending on their cultural backgrounds.

In rare circumstances, employees involved in implementing a school's grievance procedures may be able to demonstrate that prior training and experience has provided them with competency in the areas covered in the school's training. For example, the combination of effective prior training and experience investigating complaints of sexual violence, together with training on the school's current grievance procedures may be sufficient preparation for an employee to resolve Title IX complaints consistent with the school's grievance procedures. In-depth knowledge regarding Title IX and sexual violence is particularly helpful. Because laws and school policies and procedures may change, the only way to ensure that all employees involved in implementing the school's grievance procedures have the requisite training or experience is for the school to provide regular training to all individuals involved in implementing the school's Title IX grievance procedures even if such individuals also have prior relevant experience.

**J-4. What type of training on sexual violence should a school provide to its students?**

**Answer:** To ensure that students understand their rights under Title IX, a school should provide age-appropriate training to its students regarding Title IX and sexual violence. At the elementary and secondary school level, schools should consider whether sexual violence training should also be offered to parents, particularly training on the school's process for handling complaints of sexual violence. Training may be provided separately or as part of the school's broader training on sex discrimination and sexual harassment. However, sexual violence is a unique topic that should not be assumed to be covered adequately in other educational programming or training provided to students. The school may want to include this training in its orientation programs for new students; training for student athletes and members of student organizations; and back-to-school nights. A school should consider educational methods that are most likely to help students retain information when designing its training, including repeating the training at regular intervals. OCR recommends that, at a minimum, the following topics (as appropriate) be covered in this training:

- Title IX and what constitutes sexual violence, including same-sex sexual violence, under the school's policies;
- the school's definition of consent applicable to sexual conduct, including examples;
- how the school analyzes whether conduct was unwelcome under Title IX;
- how the school analyzes whether unwelcome sexual conduct creates a hostile environment;
- reporting options, including formal reporting and confidential disclosure options and any timeframes set by the school for reporting;
- the school's grievance procedures used to process sexual violence complaints;
- disciplinary code provisions relating to sexual violence and the consequences of violating those provisions;
- effects of trauma, including neurobiological changes;
- the role alcohol and drugs often play in sexual violence incidents, including the deliberate use of alcohol and/or other drugs to perpetrate sexual violence;
- strategies and skills for bystanders to intervene to prevent possible sexual violence;
- how to report sexual violence to campus or local law enforcement and the ability to pursue law enforcement proceedings simultaneously with a Title IX grievance; and
- Title IX's protections against retaliation.

The training should also encourage students to report incidents of sexual violence. The training should explain that students (and their parents or friends) do not need to determine whether incidents of sexual violence or other sexual harassment created a

hostile environment before reporting the incident. A school also should be aware that persons may be deterred from reporting incidents if, for example, violations of school or campus rules regarding alcohol or drugs were involved. As a result, a school should review its disciplinary policy to ensure it does not have a chilling effect on students' reporting of sexual violence offenses or participating as witnesses. OCR recommends that a school inform students that the school's primary concern is student safety, and that use of alcohol or drugs never makes the survivor at fault for sexual violence.

It is also important for a school to educate students about the persons on campus to whom they can confidentially report incidents of sexual violence. A school's sexual violence education and prevention program should clearly identify the offices or individuals with whom students can speak confidentially and the offices or individuals who can provide resources such as victim advocacy, housing assistance, academic support, counseling, disability services, health and mental health services, and legal assistance. It should also identify the school's responsible employees and explain that if students report incidents to responsible employees (except as noted in question E-3) these employees are required to report the incident to the Title IX coordinator or other appropriate official. This reporting includes the names of the alleged perpetrator and student involved in the sexual violence, as well as relevant facts including the date, time, and location, although efforts should be made to comply with requests for confidentiality from the complainant. For more detailed information regarding reporting and responsible employees and confidentiality, see questions D-1 to D-5 and E-1 to E-4.

#### **K. Retaliation**

##### **K-1. Does Title IX protect against retaliation?**

**Answer:** Yes. The Federal civil rights laws, including Title IX, make it unlawful to retaliate against an individual for the purpose of interfering with any right or privilege secured by these laws. This means that if an individual brings concerns about possible civil rights problems to a school's attention, including publicly opposing sexual violence or filing a sexual violence complaint with the school or any State or Federal agency, it is unlawful for the school to retaliate against that individual for doing so. It is also unlawful to retaliate against an individual because he or she testified, or participated in any manner, in an OCR or school's investigation or proceeding. Therefore, if a student, parent, teacher, coach, or other individual complains formally or informally about sexual violence or participates in an OCR or school's investigation or proceedings related to sexual violence, the school is prohibited from retaliating (including intimidating, threatening, coercing, or in any way

discriminating against the individual) because of the individual's complaint or participation.

A school should take steps to prevent retaliation against a student who filed a complaint either on his or her own behalf or on behalf of another student, or against those who provided information as witnesses.

Schools should be aware that complaints of sexual violence may be followed by retaliation against the complainant or witnesses by the alleged perpetrator or his or her associates. When a school knows or reasonably should know of possible retaliation by other students or third parties, it must take immediate and appropriate steps to investigate or otherwise determine what occurred. Title IX requires the school to protect the complainant and witnesses and ensure their safety as necessary. At a minimum, this includes making sure that the complainant and his or her parents, if the complainant is in elementary or secondary school, and witnesses know how to report retaliation by school officials, other students, or third parties by making follow-up inquiries to see if there have been any new incidents or acts of retaliation, and by responding promptly and appropriately to address continuing or new problems. A school should also tell complainants and witnesses that Title IX prohibits retaliation, and that school officials will not only take steps to prevent retaliation, but will also take strong responsive action if it occurs.

#### **I. First Amendment**

##### **L-1. How should a school handle its obligation to respond to sexual harassment and sexual violence while still respecting free-speech rights guaranteed by the Constitution?**

**Answer:** The DCL on sexual violence did not expressly address First Amendment issues because it focuses on unlawful physical sexual violence, which is not speech or expression protected by the First Amendment.

However, OCR's previous guidance on the First Amendment, including the 2001 Guidance, OCR's July 28, 2003, Dear Colleague Letter on the First Amendment,<sup>35</sup> and OCR's October 26, 2010, Dear Colleague Letter on harassment and bullying,<sup>36</sup> remain fully in effect. OCR has made it clear that the laws and regulations it enforces protect students from prohibited discrimination and do not restrict the exercise of any expressive activities or speech protected under the U.S. Constitution. Therefore, when a school works to prevent

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<sup>35</sup> Available at <http://www.ed.gov/ocr/firstamend.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Available at <http://www.ed.gov/ocr/letters/colleague-201010.html>.

and redress discrimination, it must respect the free-speech rights of students, faculty, and other speakers.

Title IX protects students from sex discrimination; it does not regulate the content of speech. OCR recognizes that the offensiveness of a particular expression as perceived by some students, standing alone, is not a legally sufficient basis to establish a hostile environment under Title IX. Title IX also does not require, prohibit, or abridge the use of particular textbooks or curricular materials.<sup>37</sup>

**M. The Clery Act and the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013**

**M-1. How does the Clery Act affect the Title IX obligations of institutions of higher education that participate in the federal student financial aid programs?**

**Answer:** Institutions of higher education that participate in the federal student financial aid programs are subject to the requirements of the Clery Act as well as Title IX. The Clery Act requires institutions of higher education to provide current and prospective students and employees, the public, and the Department with crime statistics and information about campus crime prevention programs and policies. The Clery Act requirements apply to many crimes other than those addressed by Title IX. For those areas in which the Clery Act and Title IX both apply, the institution must comply with both laws. For additional information about the Clery Act and its regulations, please see <http://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/campus.html>.

**M-2. Were a school's obligations under Title IX and the DCL altered in any way by the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, Pub. L. No. 113-4, including Section 304 of that Act, which amends the Clery Act?**

**Answer:** No. The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act has no effect on a school's obligations under Title IX or the DCL. The Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act amended the Violence Against Women Act and the Clery Act, which are separate statutes. Nothing in Section 304 or any other part of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act relieves a school of its obligation to comply with the requirements of Title IX, including those set forth in these Questions and Answers, the 2011 DCL, and the *2001 Guidance*. For additional information about the Department's negotiated rulemaking related to the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act please see <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/reg/hearulemaking/2012/vawa.html>.

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<sup>37</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 106.42.

#### N. Further Federal Guidance

N-1. Whom should I contact if I have additional questions about the DCL or OCR's other Title IX guidance?

Answer: Anyone who has questions regarding this guidance, or Title IX should contact the OCR regional office that serves his or her state. Contact information for OCR regional offices can be found on OCR's webpage at

<https://wdcrobcolo01.ed.gov/CFAPPS/OCR/contactus.cfm>. If you wish to file a complaint of discrimination with OCR, you may use the online complaint form available at <http://www.ed.gov/ocr/complaintintro.html> or send a letter to the OCR enforcement office responsible for the state in which the school is located. You may also email general questions to OCR at [ocr@ed.gov](mailto:ocr@ed.gov).

N-2. Are there other resources available to assist a school in complying with Title IX and preventing or responding to sexual violence?

Answer: Yes. OCR's policy guidance on Title IX is available on OCR's webpage at <http://www.ed.gov/ocr/publications.html#TitleIX>. In addition to the April 4, 2011, Dear Colleague Letter, OCR has issued the following resources that further discuss a school's obligation to respond to allegations of sexual harassment and sexual violence:

- Dear Colleague Letter: Harassment and Bullying (October 26, 2010), <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201010.pdf>
- *Sexual Harassment: It's Not Academic* (Revised September 2008), <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/ocrshpam.pdf>
- *Revised Sexual Harassment Guidance: Harassment of Students by Employees, Other Students, or Third Parties* (January 19, 2001), <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/shguide.pdf>



In addition to guidance from OCR, a school may also find resources from the Departments of Education and Justice helpful in preventing and responding to sexual violence:

- Department of Education's Letter to Chief State School Officers on Teen Dating Violence Awareness and Prevention (February 28, 2016)  
<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/sepletter/130228.html>
- Department of Education's National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments  
<http://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/>
- Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women  
<http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/>



## TRANSGENDER STUDENTS

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*The NASSP Board of Directors stated its intent to adopt the following position statement on May 5. It will be open for a public comment period until Friday, June 10, and the Board will give final approval at its next meeting in July. Please send feedback to Amanda Karhuse, NASSP Director of Advocacy, at [karhusea@nassp.org](mailto:karhusea@nassp.org) ([karhusea@nassp.org](mailto:karhusea@nassp.org)).*

### Purpose

To acknowledge concerns related to marginalization and institutional bias associated with transgender students; state the association's opposition to legislation and policies that discriminate against transgender students; and to provide recommendations for federal, state, and local policymakers and school leaders on how to better support transgender students in the K-12 education system.

### Issue

According to the American Psychological Association, "transgender" is an umbrella term that incorporates differences in gender identity wherein one's assigned biological sex doesn't match their felt identity (American Psychological Association, 2015). While transgender students are a small percentage of the overall student population in middle and high schools, there seems to be an increasing number of children transitioning in this age group and a greater awareness of transgender issues among principals.

Unfortunately, a climate conducive to the educational success of transgender students remains elusive in many schools. In an annual survey of more than 7,000 students ages 13--21, the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) found that transgender students were more likely than any other students to have negative experiences at school and were more likely to have felt unsafe and to experience victimization based on their gender identity or expression. The survey also indicated that 42.2% of transgender students had been prevented from using their preferred name, 59.2% had been required to use a bathroom or locker room of their legal sex, and 31.6% had been prevented from wearing clothes considered inappropriate based on their legal sex.

Fourteen states and the District of Columbia have enacted laws to explicitly prohibit such discrimination in schools based on real or perceived gender identity or expression. While no such federal law exists, courts and the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) have held that harassment and other discrimination of transgender students constitutes gender or sex discrimination, which is prohibited under Title IX. In addition, OCR and the Department of Justice approved an equity and nondiscrimination policy developed by the Arcadia Unified School District in 2015 that affirms the right of transgender students to be treated in accordance with their gender identity, even with regard to sex-separated facilities and activities (Orr & Baum, 2015). Many states have also adopted eligibility rules that explicitly permit transgender students to participate in school sports consistent with their gender identity.

Nonetheless, state legislatures are increasingly considering legislation that discriminates against transgender individuals with a particular focus on students in K-12 public schools. The Human Rights Campaign reported in February 2016 that 44 anti-transgender bills had been filed in 16 states; more than double the amount in 2015. Twenty-three of the bills are targeted specifically at children in schools, including legislation regarding school sports and public school facilities. In March 2016, North Carolina became the first state to pass a bill that requires transgender students to access restrooms, locker rooms, and shower rooms in accordance with the sex on their birth certificate. Similar bills reached the governor's desk in South Dakota and Georgia, but were eventually vetoed.

### Guiding Principles

The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders adopted in October 2015 state that effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Students should be able to enter school free of judgment from school officials and their peers. Therefore, the principal must provide an affirming school environment where each student is treated fairly, respectfully, and with an understanding of each student's culture and context.

Principals influence the school culture in profound ways, specifically in the values they emphasize and the behaviors they reinforce.

The principal's primary responsibility is to create and sustain a school environment in which each student is known, accepted and valued, trusted and respected, cared for and encouraged to be an active and responsible member of the school community.

The principal also must support a school environment where diversity is valued and accepted and where students from diverse backgrounds and identities are affirmed, supported, and assured equitable educational opportunities and access to school and community-based support services.

### Recommendations for Federal Policymakers

- Enact legislation to provide a comprehensive federal prohibition of discrimination in public schools based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Release and periodically update guidance that strongly affirms the protections transgender students are afforded under Title IX and provide schools with recommendations on best practices to ensure they are not discriminating against transgender youth.
- Fully fund Title IV, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to improve school conditions for student learning through school-based mental health services, bullying and harassment prevention programs, and schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports.

- Promote policies for student information records that respect transgender students' need for privacy throughout the P-20 education continuum.

#### Recommendations for State Policymakers

- Oppose any attempt to introduce or pass legislation aimed at discriminating against transgender students, including bills aimed at restricting the use of restrooms or locker rooms and participation in sports and other school activities that correspond with a student's gender identity.
- Align and adjust records policies to eliminate provisions that prevent school leaders from respecting a student's gender identity on their formal record.
- Provide for a sufficient number of school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers to support safe and welcoming school environments, provide school-based interventions, and coordinate mental health and wellness services.  
Provide funding for new school construction and maintenance that will help schools update their facilities to include gender neutral restrooms, locker rooms and shower rooms.

#### Recommendations for District Policymakers

- Ensure that district policies on bullying and harassment specifically protect students based on real or perceived gender or gender identity.
- Review the GLSEN Model District Policy on Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students and revise district policies if needed.
- Develop policies and protocols for maintaining correct data for transgender students in the district student information system regardless of the student's legal name or gender marker.
- Provide support for the unique privacy needs of transgender students so they can comfortably participate in field trips, overnight trips, and other school activities.
- Provide ongoing professional development for principals, teachers, and other school staff to increase awareness of transgender issues in schools; create a school climate that avoids gender stereotyping and affirms the gender identity of all children; and to prevent, identify and respond to bullying, harassment and discrimination.
- Ensure that school counselors, school psychologists and school social workers receive specialized training on understanding and responding to the needs of transgender students.
- Assist schools to update their facilities to include gender neutral restrooms, locker rooms and shower rooms.
- In the annual notices sent to all parents at the beginning of the school year, include a disclosure stating that the district allows students to participate in sex-segregated school programs and activities consistent with their gender identity or expression.
- Make the district's nondiscrimination policy readily accessible to students and parents on the district and schools' websites and in policy manuals available in school offices.

#### Recommendations for School Leaders

- Familiarize yourself with state and district policies regarding transgender students and consult your school or district attorney should you have any questions or concerns.
- Advocate for school district policies that include protections for transgender students if those policies are not currently in place.
- Model and set expectations for students, staff, and parents about how to build a positive school culture where all students feel included and respected, regardless of their gender identity or gender expression.
- Provide training to student leaders so that they are able to communicate and model respect for the gender identity of all students.
- Support student clubs that promote gender inclusiveness and display supportive signs and posters in the school.
- Ensure that all incidents of discrimination, harassment or violence are thoroughly investigated and that appropriate actions are taken.
- Regularly administer a school climate survey of students, parents, and school personnel, and use the data to improve school conditions for all stakeholders.
- Remind your staff, students, parents and community members of the need to support the rights of all students--including transgender students--and that diminishing those rights runs contrary to the values of the school. A student's gender identity or expression is one such right, which should be respected--regardless of whether the student has begun the medical process of gender transition--especially in:
  - Privacy: Unless the student chooses to disclose certain information, his or her transgender status, legal name or sex assigned at birth is confidential medical information and considered "personally identifiable information" under the Family Educational Rights Privacy Act (FERPA). Disclosure of that information to other school staff or parents could violate the school's obligations under FERPA or constitutional privacy protections.
  - Name and pronouns: All school staff should use the student's preferred name and pronoun, which is a sign of respect to the student and affirms his or her gender identity. Documents with the student's birth name should not be circulated, and principals should follow the lead of other school districts that have found solutions to comply with recordkeeping and reporting requirements while also meeting their obligations to safeguard the student's privacy.
  - Dress: Transgender students have the right to dress in a manner consistent with their gender identity or gender expression as long as it complies with the school or district dress code.  
Restrooms and locker rooms: Unless the student has a preference for another option, transgender students have the right to use the restroom and locker room consistent with their gender identity or gender expression. Any student who feels uncomfortable sharing the facilities with a transgender student should be provided a private facility, such as a single-occupancy restroom or changing

- Physical education and interscholastic athletic activities: Unless your state athletics association has established other rules, transgender students should be allowed to participate in school sports, and health and physical education classes consistent with their gender identity. Enrolling them in the wrong class could disclose their transgender status and be a violation of their privacy.
- Overnight field trips: Transgender students should have the opportunity to room with peers that match their gender identity, and schools should try to pair the transgender student with peers with whom the student feels comfortable. The school should also honor requests for alternative sleeping arrangements if that is the transgender student's preference.
- School traditions: Transgender students should be allowed to participate in all school traditions, such as homecoming court, in the gender category that matches their gender identity or gender expression.
- When contacting the parent or guardian of a transgender student, use the student's legal name and pronoun corresponding to the student's gender assigned at birth unless the student, parent or guardian has specified otherwise.
- If a student makes the decision to transition during the school year, convene a meeting with the students and parents (if they are involved in the process) to discuss their preferences and any concerns; develop a timeline for the transition in order to create conditions for a safe and supporting environment at the school; and provide appropriate information and training for any educators that interact directly with the student on the transition plan, timelines for transition, and any relevant legal requirements.
- Develop a communications plan that outlines who needs to know what information, when, and how it will be communicated.
- Ensure that the student and his or her parents, if appropriate, have access to counseling and other mental health services as needed.

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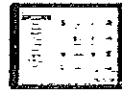
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