![gender spectrum logo]

Back-to-School Toolkit

The beginning of the school year is an ideal time to establish a foundation of gender inclusion in your schools and classrooms. The following materials are designed to set a tone that demonstrates your commitment to making sure every student's gender is recognized and accepted. For additional resources, please visit our website at www.genderspectrum.org.

Framework for Gender Inclusive Schools

When someone with the authority of a teacher describes the world and you're not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing

--Adrienne Rich

Gender inclusive schools…

- Recognize that gender impacts all students
- Interrupt binary notions of gender
- Normalize gender diversity

- Question limited portrayals of gender
- Support students' self-reflection
- Teach empathy and respect

Entry Points

When focusing on the intentional development of gender inclusive school settings, it is helpful to think in terms of four discrete entry points: **Personal**, **Structural**, **Interpersonal**, and **Instructional**. Depending on the context, any one of these may prove the best starting point for this work.

Personal entry points focus on educators' own understandings of gender. It involves reflection about how each person's experiences and beliefs about gender impact the work they do with students. Using tools such as *My Gender Journey*, this entry point is really a foundation of learning upon which teachers build their gender inclusive practices, in the process applying a lens of gender awareness to all they do in their classrooms.

Structural entry points are institutional steps that create a foundation for gender inclusive practices to take hold. Structural entry points demonstrate to your community that the institution recognizes and honors gender diversity and actively works to reflect a more complex understanding about gender. Such approaches include:

- Policies/administrative regulations emphasizing gender as an area of diversity protected and supported by the school
- Systematic staff training that builds the capacity of teachers and other staff to honor the gender diversity of all students
- Student information systems allowing families to specify a child's gender marker, preferred name and pronouns

- Identified staff members functioning as leads around gender diversity work or issues
- Gender neutral restroom/facilities that provide options for privacy without stigmatizing any students
- Readily available written materials and information about gender diversity
- Signage/imagery celebrating gender diversity
- Procedures/forms that demonstrate a non-binary understanding of gender

Interpersonal entry points are the various ways in which individual interactions and communications are utilized to reinforce the school's commitment to gender inclusion. Supported by many of the structural components, these relational aspects nonetheless require intentional behaviors in the day-to-day interrelationships of a campus. They literally voice a school's commitment to honoring the gender diversity of all students. Frequently language-based, teachers operating from this entry point:

Use language that challenges binary notions of gender
- *There are lots of ways to be a boy or a girl or even something else; isn't that great?*
- *Toys are toys, hair is hair, colors are colors, and clothes are clothes*
- *Is there only one way to be a boy or girl? Can boys and girls like the same things?*
- Rather than "boys and girls," "ladies and gentlemen," etc., refer to pupils as "students," "children," or another non-gendered term for the group.

Help students understand the difference between patterns and rules
- o *Who says only girls wear dresses? Do all-girls wear them? Do all boys wear dresses? Do some?*
- o *What patterns have you observed about expectations for you about gender from peers? The media?*
- o *Sure, boys might do certain activities more than girls or vice versa. But that doesn't mean all boys do those things or are supposed to wear that girls don't or shouldn't do that!*

Question limited portrayals of gender
- o *Who decided what things are for boys and what things are for girls?*
- o *Sometimes this stuff is confusing. We get messages that some things are for boys and some things are for girls. But these messages are just some people's ideas. They may not be right for you.*

Recognize that gender is more about our identity than anything else
- o *No one gets to tell another person how to feel on the inside.*
- o *How someone feels about their gender comes from their hearts and their minds (and not their pants!)*
- o *Some bodies are thought of as "boy" and some though of as "girl" but that's not true for everyone.*

Support processes of reflection
- o *Who we are or who others think we are on the outside is not always who we are on the inside; think of all the wonderful things about yourself that no one else knows about by just looking at you!*
- o *Being a boy or a girl or something else is not about what you like or what you wear or your body. It is something that each of us figures out for ourselves based on how we feel inside*

Teach empathy and respect
- o *How do you think you would feel if people were always asking you about your own gender?*
- o *No one likes to be pointed out by others. Does it feel good if you think others are talking about you?*
- o *Have you ever been teased? How does it feel when you are teased or treated as an outsider?*

Normalize gender diversity
- o *Ideas about gender are changing all of the time.*
- o *History is full of examples of gender diversity! There have been gender diverse people in every culture and religion, from all over the world and throughout time.*

Instructional entry points are specific ways in which teaching and learning are used to instill greater awareness and understanding about gender. Whether standing alone or integrated into other aspects of instruction, these approaches are the most direct way to impact students. In some ways, instructional approaches are the most easily accomplished. Teachers in their classrooms can have a great deal of autonomy for what takes place there. Yet at the same time, in an era of increasingly scripted curricula or environments in which controversial subjects are highly scrutinized and regulated, instructional methods for creating gender inclusion can have the highest stakes for teachers or other educators. Instructional approaches include:

- Designing lesson plans to expand understandings of gender diversity
- Exploring curriculum areas or units for inserting gender diversity issues or topics
- Using literature that has themes raising gender diversity issues
- Utilizing the arts to explore gender
- Using the social-emotional curriculum to surface gender related themes
- Examining the media and popular culture for gender related messages
- Assigning open ended projects that include gender related topics, readings, or news

- Arranging for transgender or other gender expansive people to present in classrooms
- Analyzing data about various trends related to evolving understandings of gender
- Inviting guest speakers who work for greater gender equity in education, law or other fields
- Using video or other media that present specific ideas about gender
- Creating space for students to articulate their own understanding and beliefs about gender
- Integrating gender into curriculum areas through story problems, writing prompts, readings, art assignments, research projects and more

SEX?
SEXUAL ORIENTATION?
GENDER IDENTITY?
GENDER EXPRESSION?

Knowing the difference can make *all* the difference to students who do not conform to binary norms.

By Joel Baum and Kim Westheimer
Illustration by Mark McGinnis

IF YOU'RE AN EDUCATOR, chances are you have struggled to support students who question their sexual identity or don't fit neatly into social expectations of what it means to be a boy or a girl. Perhaps you can relate to situations like these:

One of my students wants to be referred to as a boy. The student's mother is adamant: "My daughter is a girl!"

My 7-year-old is tired of students constantly questioning why he plays with dolls. I am supportive of him, but I don't know what to do.

Two colleagues in the teachers' room discussed a boy who is sensitive and not into sports. One of them said, "He's going to be gay for sure."

At the heart of these scenarios lies confusion about the nature of gender, sex and sexual orientation. When adults don't understand the complexity of these concepts, young people must navigate these and other challenging situations by themselves.

In a recent blog post titled, "I'm An 18-Year-Old Boy Who Wears Blue Nail Polish—Get Over It," blogger Nasir Fleming wrote: "Enforced gender roles do not only affect those who break them,

Spectrums make room for anyone whose experiences do not narrowly fit into binary choices such as man/woman, feminine/masculine or straight/gay.

but also those who give their blood, sweat and health just to fit in with them."

Fleming's choice of words is not an exaggeration. Imagine being a transgender student who dehydrates himself to avoid using the girls' bathroom all day, or a student who is ready to drop out of school because she is bombarded with verbal or physical abuse about her perceived sexual orientation. Imagine being one of the nameless students represented in studies that document the disproportionate risks for assault, rejection and self-harm in schools that are not accepting of fluid gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation.

A Binary System

A significant barrier to creating fully inclusive schools is the presumption that sex, gender and sexual orientation fit neatly into a binary model.

This binary world is populated by boys and girls who are viewed as polar opposites. This world conflates biology, gender expression, gender identity and sexual orientation, relegating people to rigid categories: male or female, gay or straight.

Schools have a history of reinforcing binary perceptions of sex and gender. Even before children enter most schools for the first time, parents or guardians are asked to check *male* or *female* boxes on registration forms. On the first day of school, teachers might shepherd students to class in boy and girl lines. Restrooms are designated for boys and girls. Everywhere there are expectations about what kind of imaginative play and dress-up is appropriate for whom, about who is naturally

rambunctious and who is predestined to quiet studying. As students get older, they are subjected to gendered expectations about extracurricular activities, dating and dress—even what colleges and careers they're encouraged to pursue after graduation.

If we truly want to include all students, we need to look beyond binaries to create practices that include school communities' diverse representation of biological sex, gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation.

Biological Sex

Sex refers to a person's anatomy, physical attributes such as external sex organs, sex chromosomes and internal reproductive structures.

For most people, the anatomical indicators of sex line up in a way that is typically understood as male or female. However, intersex conditions also occur naturally in all species, including humans. *Intersex* refers to a variety of conditions in which an individual is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't fit the typical understanding of female or male bodies.

In the past three decades, more than 25 genes have been identified that were once believed to be associated solely with male or female biology, but in fact exhibit more complex, nonbinary variations. With the advent of

new scientific knowledge, it is increasingly evident that biological sex does not fit a binary model. Intersex conditions are increasingly being recognized as naturally occurring variations of human physiology.

Following years of organizing by intersex activists, momentum is growing to end what was once a standard practice of "gender-normalizing surgery" performed on intersex infants with ambiguous genitalia. In 2013, the United Nations condemned the use of this unnecessary surgery on infants, putting it in the same category as involuntary sterilization, unethical experimentation or reparative therapy when enforced or administered without the free and informed consent of the person receiving the surgery.

Gender Identity

Gender identity is an individual's deeply held sense of being male, female or another gender. This is separate from biological sex.

Some children become aware at a very young age that their gender identity does not align with their physical sex characteristics, even expressing the disconnect as soon as they can talk. Other transgender and gender-expansive people recognize their gender identity during adolescence or adulthood.

➡ **DID YOU KNOW?** ⬅

The rainbow flag is a widely recognized symbol of gay pride, but did you know that the purple, white and green striped flag represents non-binary pride? Visit this blog post to learn more about flags and symbols embraced by individuals from across spectrums of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.
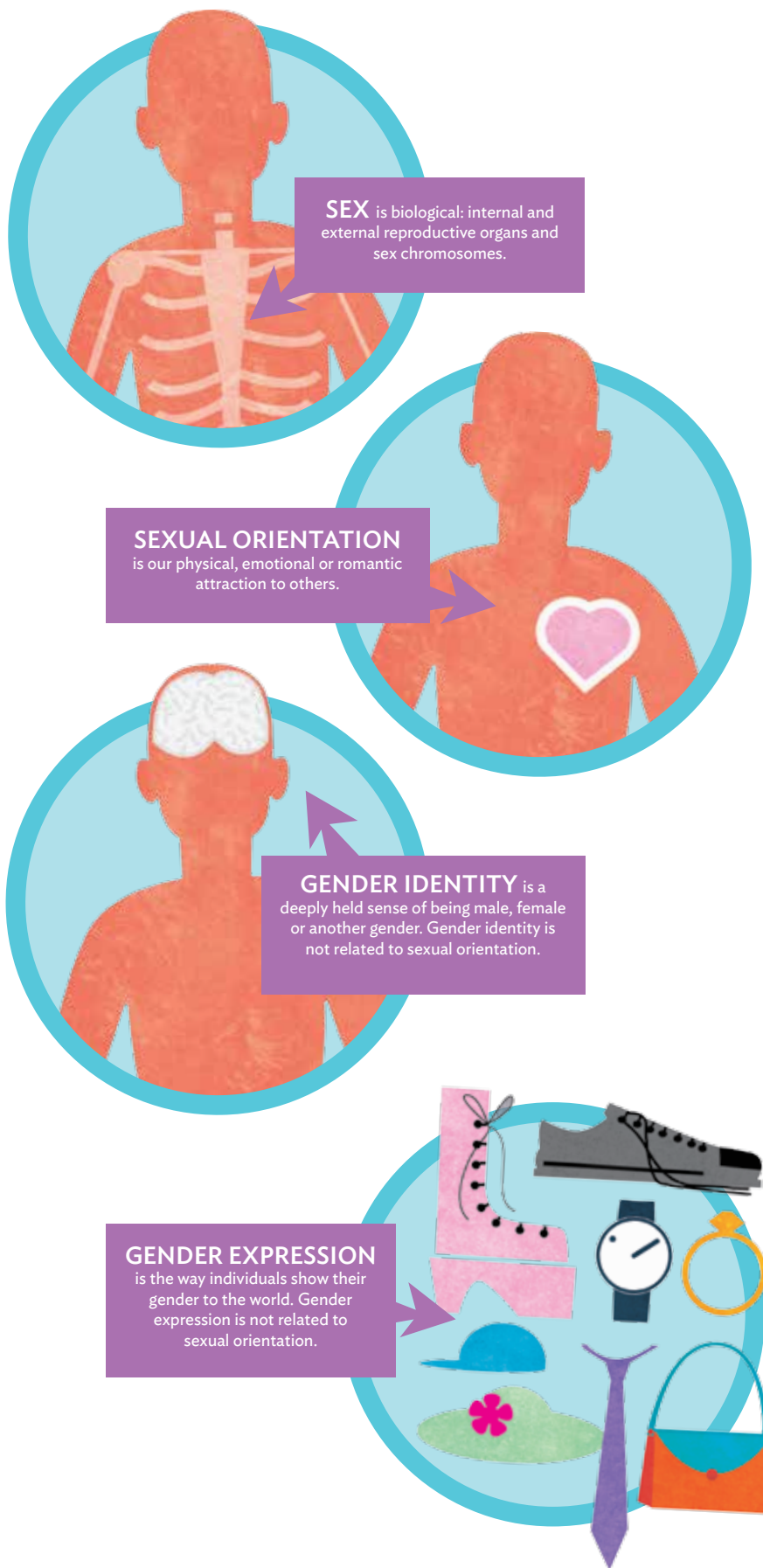
Individuals whose biological sex and gender identity "match" rarely think about the alignment of biology and identity because they have the privilege of being considered normal by society. People whose gender identity and biological sex align are called *cisgender*. Cisgender is an important word because it names the dominant experience rather than simply seeing it as the default.

Individuals living comfortably outside of typical male/female expectations and identities are found in every region of the globe. The *calabai* and *calalai* of Indonesia, the two-spirit Native Americans found in some First Nation cultures, and the *hijra* of India all represent more complex understandings of gender than a binary gender model allows. At least seven countries—including Australia, Bangladesh, Germany, India, Nepal, New Zealand and Pakistan—recognize a third gender for legal documents. As people around the world use a growing variety of terms to communicate their gender identities, Facebook now offers its users 52 options with which to define their gender.

Gender Expression

Gender expression can be defined as the way we show our gender to the world around us. Societal expectations of gender expression are reinforced in almost every area of life. Even very young children are clear about the gendered choices that boys and girls are "supposed to" make in relation to toys, colors, clothes, games and activities.

Girls whose gender expression is seen as somewhat masculine are often considered tomboys. Depending on the context and the degree to which they transgress norms, tomboys might be seen positively, neutrally or negatively. For example, a girl who identifies as a gamer geek, cuts her hair short and wears clothing perceived as masculine may be labeled as a "cute tomboy" or met with words intended to hurt, such as *dyke* or *freak*.

SEX is biological: internal and external reproductive organs and sex chromosomes.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION is our physical, emotional or romantic attraction to others.

GENDER IDENTITY is a deeply held sense of being male, female or another gender. Gender identity is not related to sexual orientation.

GENDER EXPRESSION is the way individuals show their gender to the world. Gender expression is not related to sexual orientation.
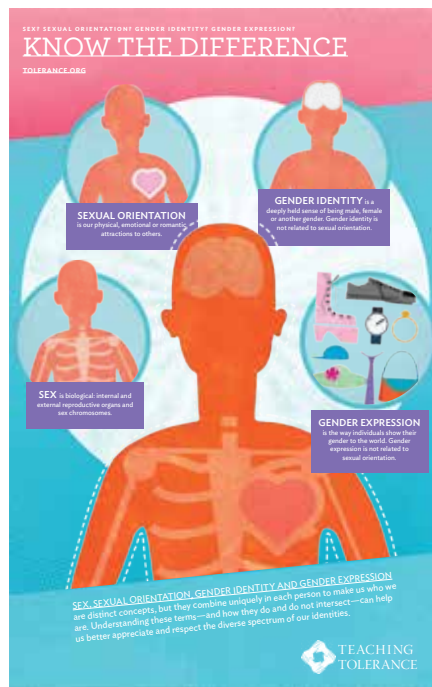
Positive or neutral labels are harder to come by for boys whose sex and gender expression are seen as incongruent. Common words used to describe such boys tend to be delivered with negative—sometimes hateful—intentions, words like *sissy* and *faggot*. There also is little room for boys to expand their gender expression. Just wearing a scarf or walking in a stereotypically feminine way can lead to abuse from peers, educators or family members.

Bias related to race, economic status, religion and other identities also influences responses to young people who break out of gender constraints. School-discipline data provide a disturbing example of this, as seen in the report Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and Underprotected. The report reveals that African-American girls who act in ways considered stereotypically masculine are far more likely to be disciplined by their teachers than white girls who exhibit similar behaviors.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is about our physical, emotional and/or romantic attractions to others. Like gender identity, sexual orientation is internally held knowledge. In multiple studies, LGBT youth reported being aware of their sexual orientation during elementary school, but waited to disclose their orientation to others until middle or high school.

Students might identify as bisexual, pansexual, queer, asexual or use a host of other words that reflect their

SEX† SEXUAL ORIENTATION† GENDER IDENTITY† GENDER EXPRESSION

KNOW THE DIFFERENCE
TOLERANCE.ORG

SEXUAL ORIENTATION is our physical, emotional or romantic attractions to others.

GENDER IDENTITY is a deeply held sense of being male, female or another gender. Gender identity is not related to sexual orientation.

SEX is biological: internal and external reproductive organs and sex chromosomes.

GENDER EXPRESSION is the way individuals show their gender to the world. Gender expression is not related to sexual orientation.

SEX, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY AND GENDER EXPRESSION are distinct concepts, but they combine uniquely in each person to make us who we are. Understanding these terms—and how they do and do not intersect—can help us better appreciate and respect the diverse spectrum of our identities.

TEACHING TOLERANCE

SHARE THE KNOWLEDGE!
Download and print this poster on 11x17 paper and hang it in your classroom or teacher's lounge.

capacity to be attracted to more than one sex or gender or not to feel sexual attraction at all. This emerging language illuminates a complex world in which simple either/or designations such as gay or straight are insufficient.

The overlap and conflation of gender identity and sexual orientation can be confusing for individuals trying to make sense of their own identities as well as for those who are clear about their identities. It can also be

complicated for anyone seeking to support them. In her book *Gender Born, Gender Made,* psychologist Diane Ehrensaft describes a teenage client who, over the course of a few weeks, identified in seemingly contradicting ways, including as androgynous, as a gay boy and—eventually—as a heterosexual transgender female. This young person was involved in a dynamic process that illustrated both the way sexual orientation and gender identity are intertwined and how they are separate.

Embracing a Spectrum Model

As we have seen, binary notions of gender, biology and sexual orientation exclude large swaths of human diversity. This diversity can be better understood by using spectrum-based models. Spectrums make room for anyone whose experiences do not narrowly fit into binary choices such as man/woman, feminine/masculine or straight/gay.

Gender-expansive and *genderqueer* are two of many terms used by people to describe themselves as somewhere on a gender spectrum—outside of the either/or choices relating to sex and gender.

A spectrum model not only makes room for people who are gender-expansive but for those who are perceived to be more typical as well. A spectrum provides an avenue to a deeper understanding of the separate yet interrelated concepts of biological sex, gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation. For educators, this understanding is a critical first step toward changing school-based practices and toward being advocates for *all* students—regardless of where they fit on any spectrum. ◆

Baum is the senior director of professional development and family services, and Westheimer is the director of strategic initiatives at Gender Spectrum, an organization that provides education, training and support to help create an inclusive and gender-sensitive environment for children of all ages.

Won't Students Get Confused?

Studies show that children of any age are able to understand that there are more than two gender categories when the concept is explained to them in a simple, age-appropriate manner. The same is true of diversity related to biological sex and sexual orientation.

Wondering how YOU might answer questions that parents and colleagues might have? See Gender Spectrum's responses to Common Questions and Concerns from Parents and Guardians.

TOOLKIT
Put this story into action! VISIT » **tolerance.org/sex-identity-expression**

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Добро пожаловать

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BE YOURSELF
CHANGE THE WORLD

genderspectrum

boy

girl

both

neither

genderspectrum

CELEBRATE
GENDER EXPANSIVE
YOUTH

genderspectrum

GENDER

BIOLOGY
EXPRESSION
IDENTITY

gender**spectrum**

The binary Gender System is <u>two</u> limiting

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THINK **OUTSIDE** THE BOXES

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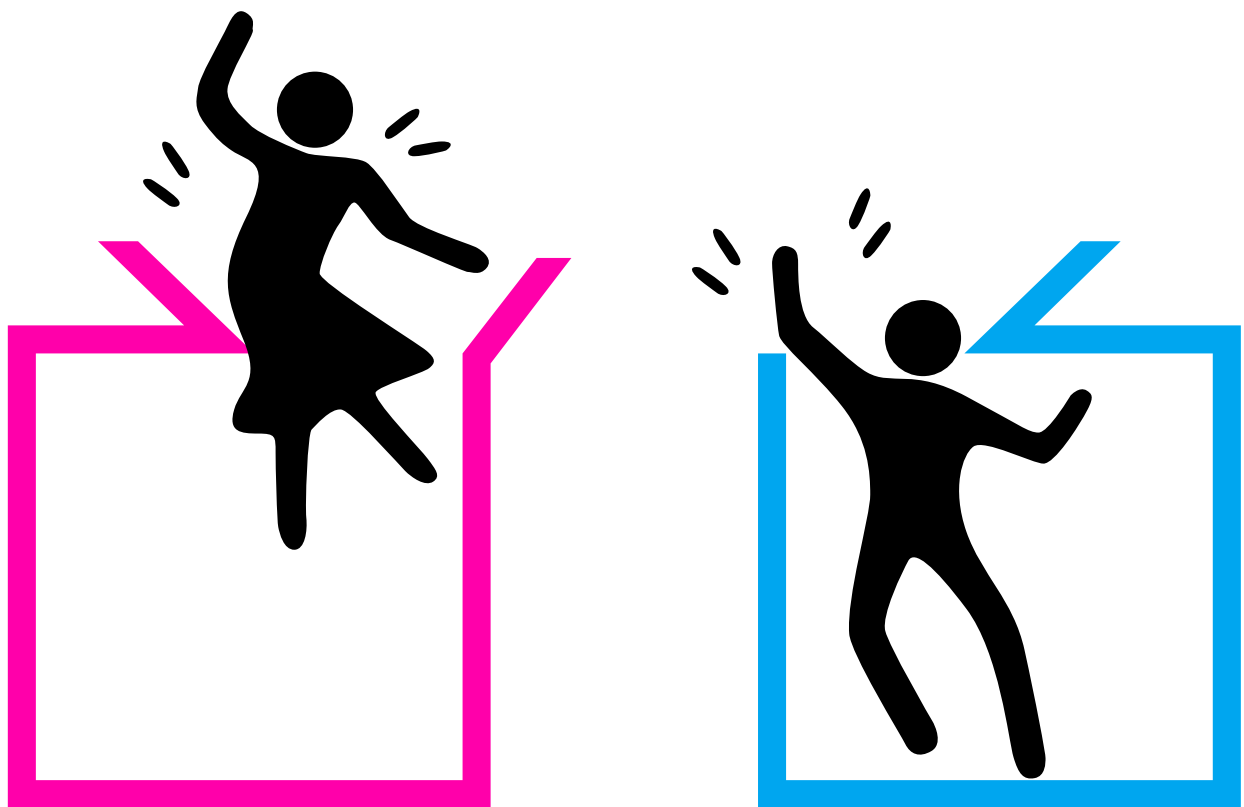
12 easy steps on the way to gender inclusiveness…

1. Avoid asking kids to line up as boys or girls or separating them by gender. Instead, use things like *"odd and even birth date,"* or *"Which would you choose: skateboards or bikes/milk or juice/dogs or cats/summer or winter/talking or listening."* Invite students to come up with choices themselves. Consider using tools like the "appointment schedule" to form pairs or groups. Always ask yourself, "Will this configuration create a gendered space?"

2. Don't use phrases such as *"boys & girls," "you guys," "ladies and gentlemen,"* and similarly gendered expressions to get kids' attention. Instead say things like *"calling all readers,"* or *"hey campers"* or *"could all of the athletes come here."* Create classroom names and then ask all of the "purple penguins" to meet at the rug.

3. Provide an opportunity for every student to identify a preferred name or pronoun. At the beginning of the year or at Back-to-School Night, invite students and parents to let you know if they have a preferred name and/or pronoun by which they wish to be referred.

4. Have visual images reinforcing gender inclusion: pictures of people who don't fit gender norms, signs that "strike out" sayings like "All Boys…" or "All Girls…" or "All Genders Welcome" door hangers.

5. When you find it necessary to reference gender, say *"Boy, girl, both or neither."* When asked why, use this as a teachable moment. Emphasize to students that your classroom recognizes and celebrates the gender diversity of all students.

6. Point out and inquire when you hear others referencing gender in a binary manner. Ask things like, *"Hmmm. That is interesting. Can you say more about that?"* or *"What makes you say that? I think of it a little differently."* Provide counter-narratives that challenge students to think more expansively about their notions of gender.

7. Look for examples in the media that reinforce gender stereotypes or binary models of gender (it won't be hard; they're everywhere!). When with others, call it out and interrogate it.

8. Be intolerant of openly hostile attitudes or references towards others EVERY TIME you hear or observe them, but also use these as teachable moments. Take the opportunity to push the individual on their statements about gender. Being punitive may stop the behavior, at least in your presence. Being instructive may stop it entirely.

9. Teach children specific language that empowers them to be proud of who they are, or to defend others who are being mistreated. *"Please respect my privacy." "You may think that, but I don't." "You may not like it, but I do." "Hey, they're called 'private parts' for a reason."*

10. Help students recognize "all or nothing" language by helping them understand the difference between patterns and rules. Teach them phrases like "*That may be true for some people, but not all people,*" or *"frequently, but not always,"* or *"more common and less common."* Avoid using "normal" to define any behaviors.

11. Share personal anecdotes from your own life that reflect gender inclusiveness. Even better, share examples when you were not gender inclusive in your thinking, words or behaviors, what you learned as a result, and what you will do differently next time.

12. Do the work yourself. What are your own experiences with gender? What might be some of your own biases? What assumptions do you make about the gender of others? Share reflections about your own evolving understandings about gender.

Using Gender Inclusive Language with Students

- There are lots of ways to be boys or girls or something else. Isn't it great?!?!
- There are lots of different types of clothes. Kids get to wear what feels comfortable to them and makes them feel good.
- Toys are toys, hair is hair, colors are colors, and clothes are clothes
- Who decided that some things are for boys and some things are for girls?
- Is there only one way to be a boy or girl? Can boys and girls like the same things? Do all boys like the same things? Do all girls like the same things?
- No one gets to tell another person how to feel on the inside. You know yourself better than anyone else does.
- Sometimes this stuff is confusing. We get messages that some things are for boys and some things are for girls. But these messages are just some people's ideas. They may not be right for you. Each of us gets to decide what we like and don't like. We just can't be unkind to others about the things they like.
- Kids can do or be or like or want anything because they are individuals with hopes and likes and dreams. This is not **because** of their gender. It is because they are people.
- Gender is a lot more than our bodies. It is about how we show other people things about our gender (maybe our clothes, or our hair, or the toys we like) and how we feel on the inside.
- Who you are is not about what others tell you, but something you determine for yourself (even when you get messages that say otherwise).
- Certain types of bodies are thought of as boy and certain types as girl, but that's not true for everyone.
- Who we are (or who others think we are) on the outside is not always who we are on the inside; think of all the wonderful things about yourself that no one else knows about by just looking at you!!
- Someone's feelings about their gender come from their hearts and their minds.
- Being a boy or a girl or something else is not about what you like, or what you wear, or your body. It is something that each of us figures out for ourselves.
- Gender expression is about the things we like or make us comfortable. There may be some patterns we notice, but these are not rules. More girls might wear dresses than boys, but does that mean all girls wear dresses? Or that boys can't wear dresses?
- Each one of us has a gender. Kids can be boys, girls, both, or neither.
- History is full of examples of gender diversity!
- There have been gender diverse people in every culture, every religion, all over the world and throughout time.
- You should be careful about thinking you know someone's gender just by looking at them. And even if you <u>do</u> know a person's gender, don't assume you know the things they like to do or wear, or play with.
- Have you ever been teased? How does it feel when you are teased or treated as an outsider?
- No one likes to be pointed out by other kids. Does it feel good when you think someone is talking about you?
- How do you think you would feel if people were always asking you about your own gender?

Gender Inclusive Classrooms: Concepts and Lessons

Below, you will find some suggestions for sequencing a program of learning about gender and gender diversity across grade-levels. These assume a proactive approach to the creation of a gender inclusive school setting. As with any curriculum development, the key is to match the needs of the specific context to the materials, activities and resources being used. In some cases, a particular student's or staff member's gender may require additional activities or approaches for supporting the school community to be fully accepting and inclusive of the individual.

Pre-K/Lower Elementary Grades (Pre-K – 2)

Overarching concepts:

There are lots of ways to be boys or girls or something else. Isn't it great?!?!

- Toys are toys, hair is hair, colors are colors, and clothes are clothes
- Sometimes this is confusing. We get messages about some things being for boys and some things being for girls.
- Kids can do or be or like or want anything because they are individuals with hopes and likes and desires. This is not **because** they are boys or girls.

Mid Elementary (2 – 4)

Overarching concepts:

Gender is very complex and not just about bodies. We all have a right to be ourselves.

- Gender includes a relationship between bodies, expression and identity
- Who you are is not about what others tell you, but something you determine for yourself (even when you get messages that say otherwise)
- People deserve to be treated with kindness and respect

Upper Elementary (4 – 6)

Overarching Concepts

Gender Diversity: Binary vs. Multi-dimensional Models of Gender

- Gender in Nature
- Gender in history and across cultures
- Certain types of bodies are thought of as boy and certain types as girl, but that's not true for everyone
- Kids can be boys, girls, both, or neither
- Gender depends on culture and history

Middle School

<u>Overarching Concepts</u>

Social expectations and limitations about gender. What happens to gender non-expansive kids?

Roles and responsibilities within a community; being an ally

- Young Adult Literature
- Portrayals of gender in books
- The biology of gender
- What are some of the pressures to conform to gender expectations, at the school and in general? What happens to kids when they don't?
- Have you ever felt like an outsider, either for your own reasons or because you were treated as such?
- What does being an ally look like?

High School

<u>Overarching Concepts</u>

Gender as a social construct

Gender and civil rights issue

- The complexity of gender is seen across virtually every aspect of society
- How have portrayals of gender in the media affected our understandings of gender?
- What are some of the ways gender is understood in different cultures?
- What is the relationship between gender and issues of power in our society?
- Young Adult Literature
- Portrayals of gender in books
- The biology of gender
- Why is it difficult to come up with solid statistics about transgender people?
- How have issues related to gender diversity shown up over the past 5 – 10 years?
- Gender and Sports
- Debates in Psychology: The DSM-5; Raising Gender-expansive Children