This is a template letter that can be used to alert school officials about policies that discriminate against LGBTQ+ individuals. Letters should be customized to describe the particular facts and relevant laws and policies in a school or district. Nothing in this template letter is legal advice, but rather, it is meant to provide a basic framework for advocating for LGBTQ+ inclusive policies and practices. Please consult with local or state legal counsel about the specific facts and laws related to any individual circumstance.

If you are writing to your school board and believe that the board should issue a supportive resolution, please consult this additional template: <https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Sample%20Board%20Resolution%20for%20LGBTQ%2B.pdf>.

For more information about your rights, consult the NEA’s guide “What Educators Should Know About LGBTQ+ Rights,” available online at <https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/what-educators-should-know-about-lgbtq-rights.pdf>. Additional resources are available online here: <https://www.nea.org/resource-library/nea-lgbtq-resources>.

UDPATED: April 7, 2023

Dear [Superintendent/Other Contact]:

We are writing to alert you to policies in [name of school/district] that discriminate against [gay, lesbian, and bisexual/transgender/LGBTQ+] students and are harmful to the school climate for all students. [IF APPLICABLE: You should also know that policies that discriminate against [gay, lesbian, and bisexual/transgender/LGBTQ+] students may violate [Title IX/state anti-discrimination laws]]. We oppose this policy and demand that [name of school/district] change its policy and commit to supporting all its students, including its [gay, lesbian, and bisexual/transgender/LGBTQ+] students and families.

[Describe the policy; if it’s a written policy, quote directly from the policy, but also add any experiences in how the policy is actually enforced. If it’s an unwritten policy, use specific examples to demonstrate what you believe is happening in the school, while being careful to not out particular students or educators who might want anonymity.]

[USE THIS SECTION IF ADDRESSING PRONOUNS POLICY]

[If related to teacher pronoun use] Using students’ correct names and pronouns is a proven measure to show respect, earn trust, and affirm our students. When adults show their students this respect and affirmation, students feel safe and can focus on learning. When adults misgender and shame their students instead, they inevitably form an antagonistic relationship with their students. This antagonism has negative effects on student learning and mental health. And once educators and administrators model unhealthy communication, other students will pick up on and imitate it, further increasing the risk for transgender and gender non-conforming students. Meanwhile, using preferred names and pronouns is associated with a large decrease in depressive symptoms, suicidal thoughts, and even suicide attempts.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Respecting names and pronouns should be a common courtesy; it’s the least we can do.[[2]](#footnote-3) But we also know that doing so will improve student wellness and mental health and allow students to focus and thrive. Most educators want to be able to support and affirm their students by addressing them properly, and it violates their sense of their obligations as educators when they are told [[they cannot treat all our students with empathy and support] OR [that it is official school policy to deny simple courtesy and respect to a targeted group of students.]]

[USE THIS SECTION IF A POLICY OUTS STUDENTS]

Outing students before they are ready is inappropriate, unsafe, and may even be illegal. Students need to be able to trust teachers and other school employees; often, they may not have anyone else to turn to. A policy that outs students against their will after they bravely confide in a teacher or administrator can place the student in danger, it can harm the student’s relationship with that adult, and contributes to a fearful school climate. We urge you to allow teachers and administrators to be sources of support for students, rather than betraying their trust.

[USE THIS SECTION IF ADDRESSING BATHROOM POLICY]

Transgender students and employees must be able to use bathrooms and facilities consistent with their gender identity. Medical experts recognize that “[d]enying transgender students this access endangers their health, safety and well-being, leads to negative health outcomes and heightens stigma and discrimination.” Students who avoid using the bathroom may have “recurrent urinary tract infections and constipation, as well as the possibility of more serious health complications, including hematuria and chronic kidney disease.” And the consequences are not just physical—medical experts also emphasize that exclusive policies “exacerbate the risk of anxiety and depression, low self-esteem, engaging in self-injurious behaviors, suicide, substance use, homelessness and eating disorders, among other adverse outcomes.”[[3]](#footnote-4)

Transgender students cannot be treated as outcasts or the “other” by their [school/district]. Transgender and gender non-conforming students already face a great deal of unwanted attention due to their gender expression. Many need to socially transition as part of their medical plan of care. And all students need to be able to safely use the bathroom at school; at its core, our students just want to use the bathroom and other facilities in peace. We urge you to adopt an inclusive policy that takes into account the safety and dignity of transgender and gender non-conforming students.

[USE THIS SECTION IF ADDRESSING BULLYING/HARASSMENT]

[Gay, lesbian, and bisexual/Transgender/LGBTQ+] students have a right to go to school without being bullied and harassed. Unfortunately, these students are common targets for bullies. More than 75 percent of LGBTQ+ youth report being verbally harassed based on their sexual orientation, gender, or gender identity during the last year.[[4]](#footnote-5) And we know that students are experiencing bullying and harassment at [name of school/district]. [describe any specific incidents, as appropriate].

When schools do not appropriately address bullying and harassment based on [gender identity or sexual orientation], it can spread quickly and multiply. And it is clear that once students become afraid of how other students perceive them, once they are traumatized or feel unsafe within the school, that fear becomes a major distraction. Students should focus on learning, not avoiding certain people and places within the school—but they can only do so if [school/district name] lives up to its responsibility to take a firm stance against bullying and harassment.

Moreover, [schools/districts] that fail to address bullying and harassment appropriately open themselves up to potential legal liability under Title IX [and state laws]. [If considering legal action: We are concerned that the climate at [school] has become a hostile environment and the [school/district] does not respond appropriately to known bullying and harassment incidents.] [School/district] must remedy this situation and bullying and harassment based on gender identity and sexual orientation cannot be tolerated in the future.

[USE THIS SECTION TO ADDRESS CENSORSHIP OF SUPPORTIVE SYMBOLS]

Schools that foster a safe, welcoming, and supportive environment consistently report better health and academic outcomes for students—and supportive teachers and administrators are a huge part of creating that kind of climate.[[5]](#footnote-6) The need for visible and supportive allies has only increased now that many politicians are advocating for laws that target LGBTQ+ students.

Teachers have always used flags and symbols in the classroom to make students feel welcome and express their values. For example, American and state flags are on display in many places, as are inspirational posters about student effort and achievement. Other teachers display prominent Black Americans during Black History Month, pennants representing the college they attended, or signs that thank veterans for their military service. All of these symbols are in the classroom because teachers are allowed to express their support for and appreciation of the people in our communities and the values that we share. Similarly, these symbols [be more specific if possible; are we talking about Pride flags, safe space stickers, transgender rights posters, etc.?] are not in the classroom to divide students; they are there to offer support and affirmation to a group that too often has not felt welcome in school. Teachers that care for their students must also stand up for their students, and the [school/district] must allow teachers to do so by proudly displaying [these symbols].

[CONCLUSION – USE FOR ALL]

We are very concerned that this policy puts students at risk. Any policy that makes [gay, lesbian, and bisexual/transgender/LGBTQ+] students feel ostracized and rejected is a matter of grave concern since we know that LGBTQ+ youth already report high levels of depression and suicidal ideation and are particularly likely to experience feelings of sadness and hopelessness and to be victims of bullying.[[6]](#footnote-7) The Trevor Project’s 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health found that 45 percent of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year.[[7]](#footnote-8) But we also know that these tragic numbers are not inevitable; LGBTQ+ students in schools with inclusive policies and supportive teachers fare significantly better, showing that our efforts to be supportive **do** make a difference.[[8]](#footnote-9)

In addition to the particular risk posed to [gay, lesbian, and bisexual/transgender/LGBTQ+] students, we are concerned about the impact policies like this have on the school climate for all students. It is well-documented that inclusive and equitable policies impact all students in the school, regardless of their [gender identity/sexual orientation]. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends LGBTQ+ supportive professional development for teachers and school staff as “a best practice for improving safety and connectedness in schools for both LGBTQ+ youth and their cisgender, heterosexual peers.”[[9]](#footnote-10)

We believe that every child, no matter what they look like, where they come from, or how they identify, deserves a safe and welcoming public school where they can thrive and prepare for their future. It is why educators are called to this profession by a singular purpose: their unwavering and unequivocal commitment to students’ learning, well-being, and potential. We look forward to working with you to ensure that these problems are quickly resolved so that all students can focus on their education and reach their potential.

Sincerely,

cc: [*Consider copying individual school board members, supportive parent organizations, and supportive local officials*]

1. Tanya Albert Henry, For transgender kids, gender-affirming names can be lifesaving, American Medical Association (June 4, 2021), https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/population-care/transgender-kids-gender-affirming-names-can-be-lifesaving (“A landmark 2018 study in the Journal of Adolescent Health found that transgender youth who could use accurate names and pronouns experienced 71% fewer symptoms of severe depression, a 34% drop in reported suicidal thoughts and a 65% decrease in suicide attempts.”). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Pronoun Guide, National Education Association, https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/29231-nea-pronoun-guide-2pgr-aug-22.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Tanya Albert Henry, Exclusionary bathroom policies harm transgender students, American Medical Association (April 17, 2019), https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/population-care/exclusionary-bathroom-policies-harm-transgender-students#:~:text=For%20the%20sake%20of%20transgender%20students%E2%80%99%20physical%20and,and%20locker%20rooms%20that%20match%20their%20gender%20identities. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Joseph G. Kosciw, Caitlin M. Clark, and Leesh Menard, The 2021 National School Climate Survey, GLSEN, https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/NSCS-2021-Full-Report.pdf at 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Joseph G. Kosciw, Caitlin M. Clark, and Leesh Menard, The 2021 National School Climate Survey, GLSEN, https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/NSCS-2021-Full-Report.pdf; 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, The Trevor Project, https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/assets/static/trevor01\_2022survey\_final.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2019, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/su/pdfs/su6901-H.pdf; Madeleine Roberts, New CDC Data Shows LGBTQ Youth Are More Likely to Be Bullied Than Straight Cisgender Youth, Human Rights Campaign (Aug. 26, 2020), https://www.hrc.org/news/new-cdc-data-shows-lgbtq-youth-are-more-likely-to-be-bullied-than-straight-cisgender-youth. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, The Trevor Project, https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/assets/static/trevor01\_2022survey\_final.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Joseph G. Kosciw, Caitlin M. Clark, and Leesh Menard, The 2021 National School Climate Survey, GLSEN, https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/NSCS-2021-Full-Report.pdf; 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, The Trevor Project, https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/assets/static/trevor01\_2022survey\_final.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Creating Safe Schools for LGBTQ+ Youth, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/safe-supportive-environments/pd-lgbtq.htm (citing and linking to resources from the American Psychological Association, GLSEN, the Human Rights Campaign, and others). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)