

Gwinnett County Public Schools' Response to USDOJ and USDOE Guidance of May 13

The “Dear Colleague Letter” issued jointly by the US departments of Justice and Education on May 13 addresses a sensitive and complex issue that has sparked spirited debate in our nation – accommodations for transgender students in public schools. As this issue involves balancing the interests of a specific group of individuals with those of the broader general student population, it is not likely to be resolved without action on the part of the courts or Congress. In the meantime, local schools and school districts are responsible for navigating waters that are emotionally charged, socially sensitive, and politically divisive. Handling this challenging issue demands both common sense and sensitivity.

Although the new agency “guidance” does not have the force of law or regulation, it does infringe upon the abilities of school districts to determine appropriate education policy, procedures, and practices for their students. Furthermore, the letter implies that in order to receive federal funds, districts must comply with the guidance. Withholding federal funds would be highly detrimental to the very students who need it most, the poor and disabled.

Given the unique safety and privacy concerns of elementary and secondary school students, this issue should be handled at the local level where school leadership can best address the needs of its students in accordance with the shared values of order, fairness, and respect. In Gwinnett County Public Schools we strive daily to ensure that every student feels welcomed, safe, and cared for in our schools. We do not tolerate harassment or discrimination toward any student, and we take prompt, appropriate action against those types of behaviors.

As we intentionally work to provide a supportive, inclusive learning environment for every student, we employ proven, common-sense practices designed to accommodate as fully as possible the needs of our large and diverse student population. We believe our current practice is reasonable, logical, and workable, and therefore, it should not be uprooted by what we consider an overreach by two federal agencies. After carefully considering the issue, GCPS will continue to provide students with sex-designated restroom facilities, while offering gender-neutral facilities to any student who does not wish to use the restroom facility designated for his or her biological sex.