

Dear Members of the School Board –

I'm writing today to support the current district Gender Support Plan. I have had the privilege of providing medical care to transgender young adults for the past 15 years, and I also provide trainings and seminars on working with transgender youth for educators, therapists, and medical providers, so this is a topic with which I am very familiar.

Current scientific evidence points to a biologic basis for gender identity (your internal sense of self as being male or female or something in between). Genetic factors, hormonal exposures at different times of fetal development, and differences in brain structure are all involved. And although a person's sense of their gender identity and ability to articulate and understand it may develop over time, very clear evidence shows that gender identity cannot be changed via counseling or therapy, be it spiritually-based, or not. In fact, young people who are subjected to such therapies with the goal of "realigning" their gender identity with their biological sex have significantly worse mental health outcomes than those who are not; they are twice as likely to attempt suicide.

Our society and culture have not historically welcomed gender-nonconforming folks (although many other cultures do and have for a very long time), and so many folks in the US are deeply uncomfortable with transgender people; many of us have been strongly socialized and indoctrinated to view such people as freaks, sinners, sick, somehow defective, or at least confused. In this situation, it is understandable to desire very strongly that such people either didn't exist or could somehow be "cured." The reality, though, is that transgender people are a part of nature's variety and that their gender identities cannot be changed, no matter how much they or the people around them would like them to.

Excellent data shows that supporting transgender youth by allowing them to use the name and pronouns and wear the clothing and hairstyles that align with their gender identity significantly improves their mental health and well-being. I myself have been struck by how often patients who initially come to me as miserable and barely functioning teens then blossom into highly successful young adults once they are able to live fully as the people they truly are.

The measures currently in the SDMA's Gender Support Plan are highly effective at supporting student well-being and success. They are supported by all of the major medical and mental health organizations, including the American Medical Association, Society of Adolescent Medicine, American Association of Psychiatry, American Psychological Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, and more. Our current plan is best practice for educational institutions, and so I thank you for it. If you would like resources, references, or more information, please do let me know.

Sincerely,

Alexandra Hall M.D.