



School Social Work Association of America Resolution Statement

SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK SUPPORTS THE EDUCATIONAL AND CIVIL RIGHTS OF TRANSGENDER STUDENTS

School Social Work Supports the Educational and Civil Rights of Transgender Students

The School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) unequivocally supports President Obama's letter that all school districts ensure the right to discrimination-free school environments based on gender, including transgender identity ([transgender civil rights](#)). As primary mental health service providers in school districts across the nation, school social workers are fundamental to the implementation of this guidance in ensuring that federal statutes protecting the civil rights for all students are implemented with fidelity. SSWAA joins a national movement of professional organizations supporting statutes that ensure discrimination-free school environments, including the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the American School Counseling Association, and the National Association of School Psychologists.

According to the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice joint letter released on May 13, 2016, schools are expected to establish and promote discrimination-free school environments that include access to facilities that match the students gender identity. Facilities that match the students gender identity include bathrooms, locker rooms, single sex classrooms and schools, and other programs or areas where students are separated by sex or gender identification. School officials are responsible for creating school climates in which students can access these facilities and programs with confidence that their rights to use these facilities are protected by policies, practices, protocols, and personnel.

School social workers have an ethical obligation to respect the dignity and worth of every student by ensuring safe environments for them to develop into fully realized adults. They work in multiple levels, including systemic work that impacts the larger school community, classroom and small group work that affects climate and safety, and individual work with students to help them process thoughts and feelings related to their development.

At the systemic level, school social workers play a key role in establishing positive school climates in which all students are able to reach their fullest social, emotional, physical, developmental, and cognitive potential. These efforts can include bullying prevention programs, age-appropriate classroom education, professional development for teachers, school-wide restorative justice programs, parent education, community education to remove stigma, and administrative consultation, among others. School social workers should take the initiative and meet with school officials to ensure that practices and protocols on campus and in cyber-environments respect the rights of transgender students to experience safe learning environments.

At the group and individual level, school social workers create confidential environments where students feel safe to explore feelings related to gender identity. In these roles, they are key advocates for individuals as they find their place within the school community.

Under [Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972](#), schools receiving federal money may not discriminate based on a student's sex, including a student's transgender status. The guidance

makes clear that both the education and justice departments treat a student's gender identity as the student's sex for purposes of enforcing Title IX.

“No student should ever have to go through the experience of feeling unwelcome at school or on a college campus,” said U.S. Secretary of Education John B. King Jr. “This guidance further clarifies what we've said repeatedly – that gender identity is protected under Title IX...We must ensure that our young people know that whoever they are or wherever they come from, they have the opportunity to get a great education in an environment free from discrimination, harassment and violence.”

The federal guidance also explains schools' obligations to:

- Respond promptly and effectively to sex-based harassment of all students, including harassment based on a student's gender identity, transgender status, or gender transition;
- Treat students consistent with their gender identity even if their school records or identification documents indicate a different sex;
- Allow students to participate in sex-segregated activities and access sex-segregated facilities consistent with their gender identity; and
- Protect students' privacy related to their transgender status under Title IX and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

Resources:

[*Examples of Policies and Emerging Practices for Supporting Transgender Students.*](#)