

**MESSAGING RESOURCE:
Supporting CA Trans and Nonbinary Students
in the Face of Nonconsensual Outing Policies**

As attacks on trans and nonbinary people continue to grow across the country, we are also seeing a rise in such attacks in California, particularly focused on trans and nonbinary youth. Below are messages that young people, parents and guardians, and advocates can use in their school communities to push back against policies that would require school staff to out trans and nonbinary students. California has some of the strongest laws and policies in the country that protect LGBTQ+ students against harassment and discrimination, including against outing students without their consent. This guidance is intended to be responsive to what we are seeing in this moment in California; ground the conversation in our movement values; and name the impact that such policies have on trans and nonbinary students, their families, and the school community.

Please note that if you are using this resource to guide conversations with other stakeholders or to support other advocacy, you may need to tailor some of these messages for your audience—for example, by being more explicit about the political motivations behind these policies or by naming positive alternatives you wish to see in your community.

Top Line Messaging:

- I. Students of all races, backgrounds, sexual orientations, and genders deserve to feel safe, supported, and affirmed at school—and trans and nonbinary students are no different.**
- II. Trans and nonbinary youth and their families deserve to decide on their own terms when and how to have these conversations, both at home and at school. Young people thrive when they have parental support and feel safe sharing their full identities with them, but it can be harmful to force young people to share their full identities before they are ready.**
- III. Policies that require outing students without their consent harm everyone—students, parents and guardians, families, and school staff—by removing opportunities to build trust.**
- IV. We can see how those holding onto power try to exploit the lack of familiarity with trans people by pitting parents and teachers against one another and spreading misinformation.**

Detailed Messaging:

- I. **Students of all races, backgrounds, sexual orientations, and genders deserve to feel safe, supported, and affirmed at school—and trans and nonbinary students are no different.**
 - Schools play a critical role in supporting students' emotional well-being and positive identity, and studies show that when trans and nonbinary students feel safe and supported for who they are in school, they are better able to focus on their studies and thrive academically and socially.
 - Rather than adopt policies that alienate trans and nonbinary students, schools should invest resources that affirm LGBTQ+ students, whether they are out or not, and support students and their families in working towards family acceptance, whatever that looks like for them.
 - *[Name what kinds of policies/programs/investments you would like to see in your community (i.e., LGBTQ+-inclusive training, inclusive curricula, mental health supports, etc.)]*
 - Inclusive education policies increase student academic outcomes, and support greater cultural understanding and awareness that helps to build empathy, affirm diversity, and foster greater connection among all students.
 - When young people feel accepted and valued for who they are, they do better in school and are better able to develop a positive self-image and lead healthy and fulfilling lives. This means being able to express themselves freely, be addressed by the name and pronouns that match who they are, and use facilities and take part in activities that align with their gender without the fear of being outed to others, including at home, without their permission.
 - LGBTQ+ students in California have the right to express themselves freely at school without fearing that teachers or administrators might out them, including to their parents or guardians if they are not out at home, without their permission. Policies that require outing students without their consent violate students' right to privacy and self-determination.
- II. **Trans and nonbinary youth and their families deserve to decide on their own terms when and how to have these conversations, both at home and at school. Young people thrive when they have parental support and feel safe sharing their full identities with them, but it can be harmful to force young people to share their full identities before they are ready.**
 - Like young people of all genders, trans and nonbinary youth know what is best for their health and well-being. Choosing when to come out and to whom is a deeply personal decision that every LGBTQ+ young person has the right to make for themselves.

- Many families, and especially parents and guardians, understand that coming out is a deeply personal decision and want to support their children coming out to them on their own terms. Many parents and guardians understand privacy is not an all-or-nothing issue and support their children exploring their identities, including at school, free from judgment or pressure and at their own pace.
- LGBTQ youth who receive support and acceptance at home, school, in the doctor's office, and in local policy debates are less likely to suffer from poor mental health, including suicide attempts, suicidal ideation, anxiety and depression.¹ Trans youth who report having at least one accepting adult were 40% less likely to report a suicide attempt in the past year.²
- While schools and trusted school staff can be a meaningful source of support for a student coming out to their parents, guardians and families, young people—not extremist policies—should decide how and when they come out at school and at home. Letting students lead and affirming their decision-making empowers trans young people and provides them with the dignity and respect everyone deserves.
- Ideally, trans and nonbinary youth would feel comfortable sharing their gender identity with their families, and many parents and guardians do respond with compassion, acceptance, and support. Unfortunately, not all young people are able to be their authentic selves at home safely and many trans young people report being more likely to find affirming spaces at school (52%) than at home (35%).³

III. Policies that require outing students without their consent harm everyone—students, parents and guardians, families, and school staff— by removing opportunities to build trust.

- Regardless of their race, backgrounds, or genders, all parents want to support and build trust with their children. Policies that out students without their consent rob families of the opportunity to build trust with one another and support LGBTQ+ youth coming out on their own terms and in a way that best fits their family.
- Policies that require outing students without their consent separate trans and nonbinary students from their support systems both at home and at school. Having a safe space to speak candidly with peers and trained counselors is important for every LGBTQ+ young person, and it is critical for those who are not out to their families, or whose families have not yet accepted their identity. Ensuring students can be their authentic selves at school without fear of being outed without their consent saves lives.
- Policies that require outing students without their consent can impact the mental health and well-being of trans and nonbinary youth when they create a one-size-fits-all response, without exceptions even for safety. These policies are cruel, requiring young people to

¹ <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2023/>

² <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Trevor-Project-Accepting-Adult-Research-Brief-June-2019.pdf>

³ *Id.*

choose between the anxiety and distress of not being able to be their authentic selves at school and the fear of being outed at home before they are ready.

- Teachers and school staff are critical allies to young people and can play an important role in encouraging students in seeking support. Policies requiring educators to out students without their consent harm teacher-student relationships by requiring them to violate students' trust.

IV. We can see how those holding onto power try to exploit the lack of familiarity with trans people by pitting parents, teachers, and students against one another and spreading misinformation.

- Parents and educators want a safe and welcoming school campus that gives students the support they need to learn and thrive, no matter their background. Despite divisive efforts, parents and educators will continue working together to build stronger public schools and ensure every student reaches their full potential.
- Attacks on trans and nonbinary youth continue to grow across the country, including right here in California. It is critical that Californians reject policies that out students without their consent and other harmful policies that seek to censor the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people and people of color being pushed by extremist groups targeting our public schools.
- The record number of anti-LGBTQ+ laws and policies introduced across the country have been part of a coordinated extremist campaign. These efforts have a measurable impact on the mental health of LGBTQ+ students, and have led to a rise in bullying, harassment, and discrimination. We must continue to come together to affirm our LGBTQ+ young people in our communities and focus on real solutions that will improve our public schools.

More Messaging Tips (For local organizing audiences)

- Evoking a sense of personal connection to an issue is critical to driving engagement and action. For example, using “we” when discussing support for LGBTQ+ young people signals a personal connection and feeling of acceptance.
- Divisive messaging and “us v. them” framing are ineffective. Avoid focusing on the other side’s negative talking points and focus on why this issue matters.

Additional CA Resources

Messaging:

- Freedom to be Ourselves – Building our Choir with a Race Class Gender Narrative Messaging Guide: <https://www.wemakethefutureaction.us/resources-documents/transgender-youth>

Data:

- The Trevor Project – 2023 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People: <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2023/>
- The Trevor Project – 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health in California: <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/The-Trevor-Project-2022-National-Survey-on-LGBTQ-Youth-Mental-Health-by-State-California.pdf>
- GLSEN – 2019 School Climate for LGBTQ Students in CA: <https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/California-Snapshot-2019.pdf>
- CA Department of Education – Research, Data and Reports on supporting LGBTQ+ students and improving overall climate for LGBTQ+ students, their educators, and their families: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ee/data.asp>

Know Your Rights and Additional Support Resources:

- CA Department of Education “Supporting LGBTQ+ Students” Resource Page: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ee/supportlgbtq.asp>
- LA LGBT Center’s National Out for Safe Schools Program: <https://schools.lalgbtcenter.org/out-for-safe-schools/>
- ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) CA LGBTQ Student Rights: <https://www.aclusocal.org/en/know-your-rights/lgbtq-student-rights>
- ACLU CA Student Mental Health Rights: <https://www.myschoolmyrights.com/rights/student-mental-health-rights/>