



## **Supporting Nonconforming and Transgender Youth at Outdoor School**

### **Information and Answers to Frequently Asked Questions for Teachers and Administrators**

#### **Acknowledgments**

This document represents the collaborative work of educators and community partners to ensure a safe and welcoming learning environment for all students at Outdoor School. It is the result of a ten-month collaboration with Gresham-Barlow and David Douglas school districts, the TransActive Center, and the Multnomah Education Service District. Reference materials produced by the 4J School District and TransActive Center were directly and widely incorporated throughout this document and the collaborators gratefully acknowledge the work, publications, and leadership of these agencies.

## References and Resources

US Department of Justice/US Department of Education: Joint Guidance on Transgender Students and Civil Rights *-and-*

US Department of Education: Examples of Policies and Emerging Practices for Supporting Transgender Students

<http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-departments-education-and-justice-release-joint-guidance-help-schools-ensure-civil-rights-transgender-students>

Oregon Department of Education: Guidance to School Districts: Creating a Safe and Supportive School Environment for Transgender Students

<http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?=4223>

Eugene School District 4J: Best Practices for Serving Gender Nonconforming Students

<http://www.4j.lane.edu/>

TransActive Gender Center

<http://www.transactiveonline.org/index.php>

## **1. General Information**

### **1.1 What is Outdoor School?**

Outdoor School takes sixth-grade students from the classroom to the outdoors where they can study those things best studied outdoors... plants, animals, soil, and water. Outdoor education can take place in the school yard, vacant lot, or on a field trip, but the greatest gains are made when students can live in the outdoors for an extended period of time, at a resident Outdoor School.

The program serves approximately 7,000 sixth-graders per year. Competent instructional staffs are employed to ensure a rich, 24-hour, living experience where, without interruption, sixth-graders and their teachers can explore forest, streams, and fields. In addition to trained adult staff, approximately 1,600 high school students are selected and trained each year to serve as student leaders with the program.

### **1.2 How is Outdoor School supervised?**

Supervision at Outdoor School is provided by Outdoor School staff, school district staff, and Student Leader volunteers.

#### Outdoor School Staff

There are a total of 12 staff members on site each week. Each one has a different set of qualities and a different set of responsibilities.

**Site Supervisor:** The site supervisor has total responsibility for and directs the day to day operation of the site. They supervise the staff and student leaders and guide the collaboration of building a successful community.

**Program Leaders:** There are 6 program leaders at each site, three male and three female. They are responsible for making sure that all scheduled activities are carried out, and directly support the high school students in working with sixth grade students. Program leaders assist on field study, supervise duties, lead recreation activities, and foster community and teamwork.

**Field Instructors:** There are 4 field instructors, one for each scientific area of study (animals, plants, water, and soil). They create curriculum in their subject area and are responsible for training staff and student leaders in teaching the activities.

**Registered Nurse:** The nurse is responsible for the health and welfare of each student and staff member. The nurse dispenses medications and attends to any medical issues that may arise. They are available 24 hours a day and are an integral part of the Outdoor School community.

#### School District Staff

**Classrooms Teachers:** Your child's Sixth grade teacher.

#### Volunteers

Student Leaders: Student leaders are responsible for the health and welfare of (# sixth graders) as a cabin group and assist the students in all phases of Outdoor School and cabin interactions. Student leaders must be at least in the 10th grade and in good academic standing at their school before being eligible for Outdoor School. High school students are screened by high school teachers and counselors as well as Outdoor School staff. While at Outdoor School, high school student leaders work under close supervision of Outdoor School staff and classroom teachers.

### **1.3 How are cabins supervised?**

Cabins are led by Student Leaders who live in the cabins with the students. Outdoor School staff supervise cabin groups and the Student Leaders. Generally, Outdoor School assigns two or more Student Leaders to each cabin to ensure that there is appropriate support for students. Sometimes a cabin will have one student leader. In that case Outdoor School will assign more experienced leaders to those cabins when available.

## **2. Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Youth at Outdoor School**

### **2.1 How does Outdoor School ensure a safe and welcoming environment for all students including transgender and gender nonconforming youth?**

Multnomah ESD and Outdoor School are committed to creating a learning environment conducive to the overall development and social emotional health and well-being of students. Gender nonconforming students often experience discrimination, harassment and implicit bias at school and in their lives. These experiences can send students the message that they do not belong. At MESD and Outdoor School, we make it clear: All students do belong and are welcome.

### **2.2 What is the definition of gender identity and gender expression?**

Gender Identity: A person's deeply held sense of their own gender, regardless of the sex they were assigned at birth. Everyone has a gender identity.

Gender Expression: The way a person expresses gender, such as clothing, hairstyles, activities, or mannerisms.

### **2.3 What is the definition of transgender and gender nonconforming youth?**

Gender Nonconforming: Describes people whose gender expression differs from stereotypical expectations, such as "feminine" boys, "masculine" girls.

Transgender: Describes people whose gender identity is different from their gender assigned at birth.

### **2.4 What is the definition of transgender boy and transgender girl?**

Transgender Boy (Female-to-Male/FTM): A student who was assigned the female sex at birth, but identifies as a boy and uses/prefers masculine pronouns.

Transgender Girl (Male-to-Female/MTF): A student who was assigned the male sex at birth, but identifies as a girl and uses/prefers feminine pronouns.

## **2.5 What is the definition of transgender transition?**

Transition: The personal process a transgender student undergoes to begin to live as their self-identified gender. This may include some or all of the following cultural, legal, and medical adjustments: telling one's family, friends, and/or classmates; changing one's style of dress; changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) some form of surgical procedure.

## **2.6 If my child is gender nonconforming or transgender, what cabin will they use?**

At Outdoor School we support a student's right to use a facility corresponding with their gender identity as consistently expressed at school or to have access to a private or single use facility. Sixth grade students that identify as male will be placed in male cabins and sixth grade students that identify as female will be placed in female cabins. Parents are encouraged to communicate with the teacher and Outdoor School staff if they have specific concerns about cabin assignments.

## **2.7 Will my child have a transgender or gender nonconforming Student Leader?**

Maybe. Student Leaders are asked to identify as male or female. If a student leader who is transgender identifies as male, he will lead male student cabin groups and be placed in male cabins. If a student leader who is transgender identifies as female, she will lead female student cabin groups and be placed in female cabins.

## **2.8 If my child is gender nonconforming or transgender, what bathroom will they use?**

At Outdoor School we support a student's right to use a facility corresponding with their gender identity as consistently expressed at school or to have access to a private or single use facility. Sixth grade students that identify as male may use male designated bathrooms, and students that identify as female may use female designated bathrooms. Student Leaders that identify as male may use male designated bathrooms, and student leaders that identify as female may use female designated bathrooms. Single stall bathrooms are also available to any student who desires increased privacy.

## **2.9 If my child is gender nonconforming or transgender, where will they change clothes and where will they shower?**

At Outdoor School we support a student's right to use a facility corresponding with their gender identity as consistently expressed at school or to have access to a private or single use facility. At Outdoor School students typically change clothes in cabins and shower in the school bathrooms. Sixth grade students that identify as male may use male designated cabins and bathrooms for changing and showering, and students that identify as female may use female designated cabins and bathrooms for changing and showering. If a student desires increased privacy for any reason, outdoor school staff will work with the student to address this need. Some options include:

- Use of a private area in a bathroom (eg. a bathroom stall with a door, an area separated by a curtain)
- A separate changing and bathing schedule (eg. using the bathroom and cabin before or after the other students)
- Use of a nearby private space (eg. nurse's office)

## **2.10 Is it possible that my child will be placed in a cabin with a gender nonconforming or transgender student?**

Yes. At Outdoor School we respect the gender identity asserted by the student. Sixth grade students that identify as male will be placed in male cabins. Student leaders that identify as male will lead male student cabin groups and be placed in male cabins. Sixth grade students that identify as female will be placed in female cabins. A student who was assigned a male gender at birth, and identifies as female, will be placed in a girl's cabin. A student who was assigned a female gender at birth, and identifies as male, will be placed in a male cabin.

## **2.11 Does Outdoor School know if a student is transgender?**

Not usually. Students are not required to tell Outdoor School if they identify as transgender. Outdoor School will only know if a student is gender nonconforming or transgender if the student or the student's parent provides that information. If a student or student's parent chooses to share that information outdoor school and the district will keep it confidential.

## **2.12 Will Outdoor School share confidential information about a student's gender identity or transgender status?**

No. Students are not required to tell Outdoor School their gender identity or transgender status. Even if a student shares their gender identity or transgender status with Outdoor School, Outdoor School is not allowed to divulge this information due to privacy laws.

**2.13 Will the topic of gender diverse youth be discussed at Outdoor School?**

Maybe. The topic of transgender and gender nonconformity is not a class or area of instruction at Outdoor School, however, the topic is prevalent in the community and the news. Children may be curious about what they are hearing on the radio, watching on television, or finding on the internet. Children may also receive information from another child who is gender nonconforming or transgender. Children will naturally ask their friends, siblings, parents, teachers, and outdoor school staff about this topic. Outdoor School staff will always create an environment that supports children asking question. When a child raises a question that is outside of Outdoor School staff's expertise, Outdoor School staff will reach out to the child's sixth grade teacher and district staff for support.

**2.14 Will my child be taught about gender identity or transgender youth at Outdoor School?**

No. The topic of transgender and gender nonconformity is not a class or area of instruction at Outdoor School, however, the topic is prevalent in the community and the news. Children may be curious about what they are hearing on the radio, watching on television, or finding on the internet. Children may also receive information from another child who is gender nonconforming or transgender. Children will naturally ask their friends, siblings, parents, teachers, and outdoor school staff about this topic. Outdoor School staff will always create an environment that supports children asking question. When a child raises a question that is outside of Outdoor School staff's expertise, Outdoor School staff will reach out to the child's sixth grade teacher and district staff for support.

**2.15 Do Outdoor School staff have training to support gender nonconforming and transgender youth?**

Yes. All Outdoor School staff have received training to support gender nonconforming and transgender youth. This training is designed to provide basic direction for staff. It will not cover every situation that arises. The intent is to provide immediate guidance for staff to create a safe and nurturing learning environment for all students and to provide staff with awareness of best practices to address situations as they arise.