

An open letter to the residents of District 211

June, 2016

We members of the District 211 community are committed to maintaining and building a fair and nurturing environment in which *all* students can learn and mature, because they are safe, affirmed and respected. Each of us shares that goal, because a healthy environment for District 211 students will foster a better community for all of us, young and old, throughout our community. We stand committed to the basic principle that no student should be left out, treated differently, or stigmatized because of who they are. We also strongly believe that discrimination towards a group of students hurts the entire District 211 community, while celebrating, protecting, and promoting diversity enriches and improves the community in a number of ways.

Consistent with these principles, we strongly support efforts in District 211 to allow students who are transgender to use the restrooms and locker rooms that are consistent with their gender identity. We therefore support the District's agreement with the Department of Education to allow Student A to use the girls' locker rooms for the simple reason that Student A is a girl. We also support the District's decision to allow Student A and other students who are transgender to use the restrooms that are consistent with their gender identity, rather than compelling these students to use separate facilities that often are remote and single the student out. Such a policy can send a signal to other students of intolerance and fear, suggesting that transgender students are different and should be shunned or avoided, and increases the chance that transgender students and other vulnerable students will be bullied or harassed in and out of school.

We believe, moreover, that the District can do better by clarifying that *all* transgender students may use the locker rooms consistent with their gender identity and without restricting these students, and only the students who are transgender, to dressing behind privacy curtains. We know that schools across the nation permit students who are transgender to use the gender-appropriate restrooms and locker rooms, without *any* reported problems or incidents. We implore the District to develop a policy that will ensure that every transgender student is treated fairly and respectfully. As a large and pre-eminent school district, District 211 can put into place a policy of the sort that has worked so well in other Illinois districts and nationwide.

We believe that accepting and integrating transgender students into all aspects of the student body enhances the educational environment and quality of life in District 211 because students who are transgender are a diverse and talented group whose gifts and skills contribute and lift up the entire student body. We also believe that welcoming students as full members of our community teaches all students the critical lesson of accepting those who are different from themselves and finding ways to live with and learn from them. We believe that a majority of students in the District want transgender students to be treated fairly and would like District's policies to reflect their views and serve as a model for the rest of our community.

We recognize that some students and parents have expressed fear about transgender students using the restrooms and locker rooms in our high schools. We recognize that these fears are based on the misunderstanding of students who are transgender and have often been presented as concerns about privacy. We care about the privacy of all students in District 211. That said, no student can claim a privacy interest in refusing to share space with another person of the same sex, simply because the other person is different in some way. We respect anyone who has legitimate privacy concerns and urge the District to make alternative, private settings available to these individuals, rather than force students who are transgender out of communal space. Eighteen states and approximately two hundred cities protect transgender individuals' right to use the restroom that matches their gender identity. This has not led to any increase in crimes in restrooms. We can make this policy work in District 211.

To further allay the fears of any student or parent, we hope that the District will continue the public education and awareness that has been on-going, because it is only by addressing concerns in a respectful, thoughtful way that we will be able to discover the needs of the entire community. Through education and dialogue, we hope that others will come to understand that a transgender girl is a girl and a transgender boy is a boy.

The need to mindfully and respectfully address the concerns of some in our community is urgent. These fears have led some members of the District 211 community to file a federal lawsuit seeking to overturn a policy that allows students who are transgender to use the appropriate restroom as well as an agreement between District 211 and the Department of Education permitting one student to use the appropriate locker facility. We urge the District to challenge

vigorously this lawsuit, and defend the policies that have already been implemented without incident, as the District has made clear.

In recent months, District 211 has been host to a loud, sometime raucous debate on the issue of welcoming students who are transgender, a debate that has garnered attention in media across the nation and led to the raising of angry voices at District 211 Board meetings. We urge the community to draw together, to speak up and put this divisive issue behind us. Each of us has opted to make this community our home because it reflected the type of values and place where we could raise our children with open minds and open hearts, prepared to meet and accept a diverse society. Together, we can achieve that dream while being respectful of all viewpoints.

Respectfully,

Mike Downing
Eric Ward
Jordan Freer
David Garst
Dave Lytle
Vickie Wessels-Murphy
Rebecca Rabe
Anne Zhang
Linda Garke
Rebecca Harmon

Angela Rublaitus
Roberta Ward
Carrie Gable
Hannah Garst
Jim Murphy
Aseema Deswal
Sydney Hill
Teresa Saunders
David Saunders
Samantha Lee

Claire Joswiak
Keely Ward
Brenda Schweda
Pam Lytle
Zack Murphy
Deane Rabe
Tracey Salvatore
Jake Lytle
Lisa C.