

STATEMENT FROM HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 211 SUPERINTENDENT DANIEL CATES IN RESPONSE TO OCR COMMUNICATION TODAY

November 2, 2015

The OCR has informed Township High School District 211 of its allegation that District 211 has violated Title IX by not providing a transgender student unrestricted access to the locker room. We do not agree with their decision and remain strong in our belief that the District's course of action, including private changing stations in our locker rooms, appropriately serves the dignity and privacy of all students in our educational environment.

The solutions proposed by District 211 included multiple privacy stations in the locker rooms designed to provide privacy to any student while ensuring the full integration of transgender students in educational programs and activities. Individualized, supportive approaches such as the ones proposed by District 211 have been implemented successfully in other schools.

District 211 has long recognized and been responsive to the needs of our transgender students, dealing sensitively and effectively with the challenges they face. OCR has even recognized this and found that the District treated Student A consistent with her gender identity in all respects except unrestricted locker room access. These actions include changing both name and listed gender on school rosters; supporting participation on sports teams of their identified gender; and providing access to the bathrooms of their gender identity, because bathrooms have stalls that protect everyone's privacy. The District also provides private bathroom accommodations, if requested. Whenever requested, transgender students and their parents have access to a support team with extensive training in addressing the identity development needs of adolescents.

District 211 is not excluding transgender students from their gender-identified locker room. Though our position has been inaccurately reported, a transgender student may use his or her gender-identified locker room simply by utilizing individual measures of privacy when changing clothes or taking showers.

The students in our schools are teenagers, not adults, and one's gender is not the same as one's anatomy. Boys and girls are in separate locker rooms – where there are open changing areas and open shower facilities – for a reason. The District is encouraged that OCR acknowledges that the District must respect the legal rights of all students, including privacy rights.

We recognize that this is an emerging and critical matter for school districts nationwide. The policy that OCR seeks to impose on District 211 is a serious overreach with precedent-setting implications. District 211 continues to believe that what we offer is reasonable and honors every student's dignity. While the District will continue what have been productive settlement negotiations with OCR, the District is prepared to engage in all avenues of due process to determine whether our position of honoring the rights of all the students is within the law.

We celebrate and honor differences among all students and we condemn any vitriolic messages that disparage transgender identity or transgender students in any way. We believe that this particular moment can be one of unification as we strive to create environments that ensure sensitivity, inclusiveness and dignity for ALL students.

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