

Support Transgender Youth in Schools By Opposing New Discriminatory Optional Guidelines

No matter their race, gender, or where they come from, all students deserve the freedom to fully express their authentic selves free from harassment. Yet, Governor Youngkin's new optional guidelines target and stigmatize LGBTQ+ students, threatening their safety and well-being in schools.

Youngkin-Suggested Guidelines Dangerous for Students, Optional for Schools

- On Tuesday, July 18, the Youngkin administration released suggested guidelines for the treatment of transgender students in schools. The new guidelines were not developed in accordance with evidence-based best practices, and if a school division elects to implement the guidelines, they would:
 - Compel school staff, regardless of their desire to protect students, to “out” transgender students, creating likely scenarios that expose students to emotional and physical abuse.
 - Disregard students' genders and force them to use school facilities and programs matching their birth sex, violating federal law and inviting litigation.
 - Allow staff and students to bully and harass transgender students by not using their names and pronouns. Misgendering students is [incredibly harmful](#) to their emotional well-being.
 - Create additional barriers for students to change their names and genders at school.
- Like with previous guidelines, school divisions ARE NOT REQUIRED TO ENACT these new policies.
- School divisions should not invite a distracting public firestorm into their schools, and should ignore these counterproductive guidelines.

Research Shows Guidelines Would Make Schools Less Safe for LGBTQ+ Youth

- [When transgender people are aware of anti-trans policies being introduced into their state](#), they report [higher levels of discrimination, greater depressive symptoms, and a decreased sense of belonging](#).
- Students [experience better mental health outcomes](#) when school officials respect their gender and use their names.
- [Research shows](#) that when transgender students feel more connected to their school, they are less likely to experience symptoms of anxiety and depression. Schools that adopt the Youngkin administration's suggested guidelines will operationalize anti-trans policies and harassment.
- All students deserve to feel safe, and transgender youth report [being physically threatened or harmed at twice the rate](#) of other student groups. Outing students will only increase this.
- In diametric contrast to the Youngkin-proposed policies, state-level [non-discrimination policies have been found to reduce LGBTQ+ bullying](#) and [increase the presence of positive mental and physical health indicators](#).



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Find this factsheet and more at veanea.org

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Push Back with Effective Messaging

- **Don't get into the details or semantics** of the guidelines – we do best in public forums with high-level values messages and not debating the details the opposition brings up.
- **Start with a value statement** that all students deserve the freedom to express their authentic selves in schools, free of harassment. Most people agree with this universal and disarming value.
- **Emphasize the policy will allow for “bullying”** of LGBTQ+ kids. A strong majority of the public agree they don't want LGBTQ+ kids to be bullied in school. This policy would give license for staff and students to maliciously bully students by calling them other names.
- **Give relatable examples** to show policy is out of step with common values. If someone asks you to call them by a certain name, common decency is that you call them that name.
- **Point out the ties to previous civil rights struggles**, including the integration of schools, women gaining the right to vote, and LGBTQ+ liberation and same-sex marriage,
- **Continue to set the record straight that school boards can ignore the guidelines**. While the Youngkin administration suggests schools must adopt these guidelines, they are 100% optional.
- See the VEA statement on the optional guidelines [here](#).

Virginia Can Make Schools More Welcoming for All Students

- The 2021 model policies developed and informed by community partners serving LGBTQ+ youth, the Virginia Department of Education, and over 9,000 public comments were widely praised by advocates who serve and work on behalf of LGBTQ+ students. School divisions can and should choose to implement the 2021 evidenced-based guidelines and reject the dangerous new policies.
- Schools with student groups affirming all genders and sexual orientations have been shown to have less truancy and better health outcomes for all students. Students who engage more in these groups felt more validated at school, an increased sense of safety, and were more hopeful. Virginia schools should seek to grow and support these groups to improve student outcomes.
- Virginia should look to other states that have a track record of improving conditions for transgender students, like Minnesota's “Safe and Supportive Schools Act,” which defines bullying, provides training for teachers, programming for students, and procedures around reporting and responses to bullying. Virginia school boards can also pass model affirming resolutions.
- Virginia should join the seven other states in the country that mandate LGBTQ+ inclusion in school curricula and standards, so all students can better see their identities reflected in school.



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