Gender & Children: A Place to Begin

Creating schools that nurture academic achievement, provide physical and emotional safety and welcome all students are common goals for all educators. In order for students to feel supported and empowered to express their identities and interests at school, educators must create gender-inclusive environments that affirm all children and that help all children move beyond the limitations of gender stereotyping.

Checklist for a Gender Inclusive Classroom

☐ **Use inclusive phrases** to address your class that are not gendered such as, "Good morning, everyone" or "Good morning, scholars" or choose and use a name for your class like the Dolphins or the Owls.

☐ **Develop classroom messages** that emphasize "All children can… (dance, cook, have short or long hair, do math, make art…)"

☐ **Group students** in ways that do not rely on gender such as table groups, letters in their names or colors of their clothes. Avoid situations that force children to make gendered choices, such as boys line up here and girls line up there.

☐ **Provide role models.** Show a wide range of achievements and emotions for all people that move beyond gender-role stereotypes. Read diverse biographies.

☐ **Read books to your class** that teach about gender and breakdown stereotypes related to gender expression and gender identity.

☐ **Use lesson plans** designed to expand student's understanding of gender. Read books that encourage discussion of gender assumptions. Help students see the limitations of gender stereotyping. Ask your class to examine popular culture, advertising, or children's toys and books for gender stereotypes.

☐ **Create classroom displays** that show a wide range of occupations and achievements for all genders. Ask students to write biographies or make hallway displays featuring people who have moved beyond traditional gender roles and have excelled in their chosen fields.

☐ **Be a role model!** When possible, give examples of how you or people you know like to do things outside of gender stereotypes.

☐ **Build student allies.** With your class, look at ways to be an ally when someone is teased or bullied for any reason. Can they try to stop it directly? Should they talk with an adult? Could they talk with the student who has been harassed? Use the Welcoming Schools *Ally or Bystander* lesson to help students think through the options.

☐ **Be an upstander yourself.** Stop hurtful teasing or name-calling based on gender and other bias. Interrupt student comments based on gender stereotypes. Engage in discussion with students by using these situations as teachable moments.

☐ **Encourage students** to connect with other students based upon interests and activities that they enjoy rather than connecting with other students solely based upon gendered activities.

☐ **Ensure safety.** Be aware of whether your students feel safe both inside and outside of the classroom. In the lunchroom? Recess? P.E? Special education classes? In the bathroom? On the school bus? Use the Welcoming Schools *Name-calling and Feeling Safe at School* lesson to engage students on where they feel safe and what makes them feel safe.

Steps for School-wide Action

- **Professional development is critical.** Provide training on understanding gender and stopping gender-based bullying. Include all school personnel — from teachers, aides and counselors to administrative staff, bus drivers, recess aides, and cafeteria workers.

- **Practice intervening** when students are limiting each other based on gender. Adults in the school need time to prepare and practice with simple phrases to stop gendered teasing and bullying. Be ready to educate students on why it is wrong or hurtful.

- **Ensure good supervision** of hallways, playgrounds, and cafeterias to increase safety and reduce name-calling and bullying. Provide some structured or adult coached activities during recess to engage more students. Encourage and teach inclusive and cooperative games.

- **Ensure anti-bullying policies** specifically name groups more frequently targeted for harassment. Include actual or perceived gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. Naming it helps to stop it.

- **Organize a welcoming or caring committee** to help develop a respectful, caring community in your school. This group could assess your school's current climate and practices, organize family education events, or develop affirming hallway displays.

- **Hold an event for parents and caregivers** in your school community to help people understand gender and children. Share ways to talk about gender that are affirming, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate.

- **Ensure educators feel supported** by the administration and others in the school in their efforts to help create welcoming learning environments by addressing gender stereotyping, bullying, and teaching to ensure gender literacy for all students.

- **Honor the name and the pronouns that a student uses.** This improves student well-being by acknowledging that you see them for who they are.

- **Review all forms** used in your school, including registration, attendance, and class lists, to include options outside of the gender binary and for children and families to share gender and pronouns.

- **Reframe dress code policy** to describe what the school considers appropriate clothing without assigning clothing options to particular genders. For example, for a chorus concert, you could ask students to wear a white top and dark or black on the bottom.