

Beyond The Bathroom: Transgender Policies Under Review By N. J. Schools

“If you are worried about your child being molested in the school bathroom, your school has other issues,” one advocate said.

Bridgewater, NJ <http://patch.com/new-jersey/bridgewater>

By ALEXIS TARRAZI (Patch Staff) - April 18, 2016 11:44 am ET



Many schools in the Garden State are reevaluating their policies on the rights of transgender students.

Most recently on Monday, April 11, the Pascack Valley Regional High School Board [approved a policy that protects the rights of](#)

[transgender students](#) following a contentious meeting.

A growing number of districts are following suit by putting policies for transgender and non-conforming gender students in place. Other schools include Princeton, Jackson Township, Rumson-Fair Haven and Ocean Township. [Toms River is also considering the change.](#)

The policies considered by schools in New Jersey vary in some way but essentially allow transgender students to use locker rooms or restrooms based on their "consistently asserted" gender identity. The policies generally require school staff to address transgender students using names and pronouns based on a student's gender identity. Students may also dress according to their asserted gender identity.

“A lot of it boils down to education,” said Corrine O’Hara, LGBT Coordinator with HiTops.

[HiTops](#) is a non-profit health education and advocacy organization dedicated to helping young adults grow into an adult by providing comprehensive sexuality education and promoting healthy relationships and supportive connections.

“People need to understand what gender identity means,” O’Hara told Patch. “This is how people are expressing who they are... Really being true to themselves. I think they should be celebrated. They are just trying to figure out who they are and be true to themselves.”

Gender identity -- a personal conception of oneself as male or female -- is formed between 18 months to 3 years and sexual orientation -- who someone is attracted to -- comes out of puberty, New Jersey native and well-known transgender author and speaker [Seth Rainess](#) said.

“Gender identity is who I go to bed as and sexual orientation is who I go to bed with,” Rainess of Monmouth County said.

These changes to policies have come with some controversy among the communities.

In the case with Pascack Valley, [Liberty Counsel Inc.](#), a conservative Christian legal organization, insists that the new policy is putting students at risk for sexual assaults and voyeurism.

Rainess said he works daily to try and fight these misconceptions. He has spoken at schools across New Jersey – such as Red Bank, Neptune, West Morris -- to educate them about transgender challenges, hoping to shift perspectives.

“Transgender people today are given a diagnosis of gender dysphoria,” Rainess said. “It means that the body they were born into is one they don’t identify with, such as the sexual parts they have. They are embarrassed by them. They don’t want to see them. There are different levels of dysphoria. But many people are inferring transgender people are exhibitionists. Why would they go into a bathroom and expose themselves to others if they don’t even want to be exposed to themselves?”

Rainess also pointed out that gender-neutral bathrooms already exist in our day to day lives such as in your own home.

- **Check out this video of Rainess explaining why transgender people will not expose themselves in a bathroom or locker room:**

[why trans people will not expose themselves in a bathroom/locker room](#) from [seth rainess](#) on [Vimeo](#).

“There has never ever been a case of a transgender person exposing themselves in a school bathroom,” O’Hara said. “If you are worried about your child being molested in the school bathroom, your school has other issues.”

Just like Rainess, HiTops offers educational workshops for parents, teachers and administrators to learn more about these issues.

“With five minutes of education, it will make sense to people or it should make sense,” Rainess said.

Rainess personally knows the struggle as he grew up as a female before transitioning into a man years later.

“I know what it’s like to live in the wrong body for 50 years,” Rainess said. “I have to chart a life I never thought possible. But I think we are at a great place right now. It’s far better than anything I could’ve dreamt of as kid growing up.”

O’Hara is also happy about more people coming to terms with who they are, but has worries as well.

“The positive side is their gender is being expressed and they are moving beyond the binary,” O’Hara said. “The downside is the suicide rate. Unemployment rate. Lack of support system. We can’t afford to lose another child due to ignorance.”

The National Transgender Discrimination Survey, the largest study of transgender people’s experiences, found that 41 percent of transgender and gender non-conforming people have attempted suicide, a rate far higher than the national average of 4.6 percent.

Helping young adults, Michael Loscialo of Somerset County has started the [LGBT Support Group of Somerset and Hunterdon County](#). Speakers such as Rainess have come to the meetings to offer insight and support.