

'Gender-expansive' school district policy takes kids' side over parents in gender-identity disputes

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A Maine school board unanimously approved a transgender student policy that takes the child's side over parental wishes regarding a student's chosen gender identity at school. (Image source: YouTube screenshot)

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A Maine school board unanimously approved a transgender student policy that takes the child's side over parental wishes regarding a student's chosen gender identity at school, the [Portland Press Herald](http://www.pressherald.com/2017/11/28/portland-school-board-adopts-comprehensive-transgender-policy/) reported (<http://www.pressherald.com/2017/11/28/portland-school-board-adopts-comprehensive-transgender-policy/>).

Language recommended by the Maine Human Rights Commission mandates that Portland Public Schools should "abide by the wishes of the student" regarding his or her gender identity at school if there is a disagreement with the student's parents or legal guardian, the paper said regarding the measure passed last week.

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"This policy is about knocking down walls between our students and their learning and their well-being," Jeanne Crocker, school district assistant superintendent, told the Press Herald.

What else does the policy dictate?

- The measure affirms and protects “gender-expansive students” as well, the [Bangor News reported](https://bangordailynews.com/2017/11/29/news/state/portland-school-board-adopts-policy-to-protect-transgender-students/) (<https://bangordailynews.com/2017/11/29/news/state/portland-school-board-adopts-policy-to-protect-transgender-students/>), adding that the term refers to those “whose gender expression and identity goes beyond what is perceived as expected gender norms.”
- It lets students use restrooms and changing rooms consistent with their gender identity, the News reported.
- It lets students use the pronouns they prefer, the News noted.
- And it calls for gender-neutral student dress codes and requires annual staff training in regard to gender issues, the News reported.



Bangor Daily News

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What was said about the new policy?

- No one who spoke during the public comment period about the measure did so in opposition to it, the Press Herald said.
- “Having grown up as a bisexual, transgender person and not having any support, I probably never thought there would be a place and a time where schools would be voting on a policy that would

affirm my identity,” Gia Drew of Equality Maine told the Bangor News. “And having been a teacher for 20 years and having to teach and hiding most of that time, I, of course, thought this would never happen. And so here we are, and I think this is going to be a great beacon to other schools across the state.”

- Mary Bonauto — an attorney who successfully argued before the U.S. Supreme Court regarding same-sex couples’ right to marry — has two high school-aged children in the Portland school district and helped the board craft the policy, the Press Herald said.
- “This is a watershed moment in the state of Maine,” Bonauto told the Press Herald.
- “Thank you for a policy that is truly reflective of our priorities. It took courageous leadership to make this happen,” Kathie Marquis-Girard, assistant principal at Portland High School, told the Press Herald. “I can’t tell you what this will mean for so many students.”
- Superintendent Xavier Botana told Bangor News he was raised in a traditional Latino family, and he couldn’t have imagined supporting the policy 20 years ago — but has re-examined his misconceptions.
- “On a personal note, this is a very significant policy for me,” Botana told the board, according to the News. “I’ve come to understand the significance of this issue late in life. I grew up with a fixed notion of gender and the idea of a fluid gender was foreign to me.”
- Botana added to the News that the school district has received opposition over the policy, not from Portland residents, “but from people in other parts of the country who’ve heard about it and have chosen to react in ways that suggest they know what we should do better than the people in Portland do.”
- “This is truly what our work is about: putting students first and making sure students are supported emotionally,” Jenna Vendil said as she wiped away tears, the Press Herald reported. “Lives are on the line.”