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Christian Educators Assn. Int'l
PO Box 45610, Westlake, OH 44145
888-798-1124 • TOV@ceai.org

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After fifteen years of educating teenagers, I know this: many adolescents struggle with confusion regarding their identities. This comes as no surprise. In fact, in some ways, I continue to learn more about my identity every day. However, to engage seriously in educating our students from a Biblical worldview, we must help them discover their identity in Christ.

Look at the story of Gideon. As Gideon fearfully hid from his enemies while threshing wheat in a winepress, God ironically, but prophetically, called him a “mighty warrior” (New International Version, Judges 6:12). Also consider Michelangelo who reportedly wrote, “I saw an angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.” When confused, broken teenagers entered my classroom, I would recall these stories and ask God to reveal His design for their identity so that I

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might play some small part in releasing them into their destinies.

Throughout my teaching career, I have humbly witnessed students respond to God's unconditional love over and over again, especially those struggling with sexual and gender confusion. Sadly, the *Obergefell* case legalizing same-sex marriage and the recent cultural attention to transgenderism have left many Christian educators confused and fearful of living out their faith in public schools.¹

Thirteen states and the District of Columbia have now passed specific laws banning discrimination based on gender identity. These laws, including California's famous AB 1266, the "Transgender Bathroom Bill," generally require that students be allowed full participation in school activities and access to facilities based on their chosen gender identity, regardless of their biological gender.² In other states, school districts like



Jefferson County, Kentucky and Fairfax County, Virginia are implementing these policies on their own, feeling pressured by new Federal Government guidelines.

So, how should Christian educators respond to a student who requests the use of a different name and pronoun or asks to join a sports team or use a locker room inconsistent with his or her biological gender?

When facing these situations, Christian educators need the guidance of the Holy Spirit. God promises never to leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), and also directs us to “lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5-6). As we approach these situations with humility

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and love, we should recognize that the Lord may have a purpose beyond what we can see.

For example, Cheryl, a California CEAI member, made a choice several years ago. One of her openly

gay high school students began to visit her classroom at lunch. He considered it a safe place to talk about his life and the physical, sexual, and verbal abuse he suffered. Could Cheryl take this opportunity to confront him about his homosexuality? Sure, but she believed the Holy Spirit led her to listen to him and pray for him instead.

After his graduation, they remained in contact, and one night over the phone Cheryl led her former student to faith in Christ. Now, years later, Cheryl describes this young man as “on fire for Jesus”—leading a Bible study for LGBTQ-identified friends, rescuing homeless off the streets, and witnessing many friends and family come to Christ, including his abusive mother.

Regarding students struggling with gender and identity confusion, Cheryl comments, “My job is to pray for them and let the Holy Spirit work in His timing.” She called her “Gideon” into his destiny. To borrow Michelangelo’s analogy, she carved away the marble with God’s love and saw the angel set free.

Christian Educators Association International and other ministries like *Cru* recommend the “Prayer, Care, and Share” model. We pray for students, care about them regardless of their beliefs and behaviors, and then earn the right to share—to speak into their lives. As educators we acknowledge the truism, “Students don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” If I

demand that my students conform to my worldview, even in terms of something so foundational as their name in my class, I can create unnecessary barriers to the Gospel.

However, some Christian educators may feel that by calling a male student by a feminine name or pronoun (or vice versa) they reinforce and thereby participate in the identity confusion. They may feel that confronting confused students instead demonstrates love and grace.

I encourage educators with this conviction to look to Daniel. As a young man, Daniel found himself in an impossible position—defile himself at the king’s table by eating unclean food, or face likely execution. Daniel’s options included defying authority or simply complying with requirements that contradicted his beliefs. But, God revealed a third option to Daniel; he wisely appealed to the king’s official, asking for a compromise that would not violate his religion nor offend the king. Subsequently, the king’s official honored Daniel’s appeal.

If the Holy Spirit leads, we can follow Daniel’s example of appealing to administration for a compromise that neither violates our convictions nor offends the students. Does this mean that the administration will always rule in our favor? No, but it does remind us to pray and trust our powerful God, looking to Him for creative solutions.

Now, I find the challenge regarding bathrooms, sports teams, and locker

¹ “Obergefell v. Hodges.” *Oyez*. Chicago-Kent College of Law at Illinois Tech, n.d. Nov 4, 2015. <https://www.oyez.org/cases/2014/14-556>

² Pupil Rights: Sex-segregated School Programs and Activities, Assembly Bill 1266 (2013-2014). Retrieved from California Legislative Information Database, Nov. 4, 2015. http://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140AB1266

³ New York City Department of Education, Transgender Student Guidelines

(Online). <http://schools.nyc.gov/RulesPolicies/TransgenderStudentGuidelines/default.htm> Nov. 4, 2015.

⁴ Fairfax County Public School, Policy 1450. (Online). Revised May 7, 2015. <http://www.fcps.edu/news/policy1450.shtml> Nov. 4, 2015.

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rooms more problematic than a name or pronoun. As a Christian educator, I feel a moral obligation to protect the privacy and safety of all my students, transgender or not.

Understandably, non-LGBTQ students have started to verbalize their dissatisfaction over losing their sense of privacy and security. A recent protest in Missouri saw over 100 students walk out of class in protest over a biological male student who had been given permission to use the girls' locker room. Township High School District 211 near Chicago continues to fight a federal government effort requiring them to allow a biological male student who identifies as female to change in the girls' locker room without privacy screens. In California, after initial failure, a second effort persists to submit AB 1266 to the voters in hopes of repeal. It remains to be seen how these poli-

cies will resolve at the state and local levels nationwide.

Still, educators in these situations can often reach reasonable compromises. For example, while transgender activists typically oppose this solution due to possible stigma, many schools have directed transgender students to use single-user faculty restrooms.

Many state or district policies may point to a balanced solution. For instance, the New York City Department of Education's guidelines:

The DOE aims to support transgender students while also ensuring the safety and comfort of all students. The use of restrooms and locker rooms by transgender students requires schools to consider numerous factors, including, but not limited to: the transgender student's preference; protecting student privacy; maximizing social integration of the transgender student; minimizing stigmatization of the student; ensuring equal opportunity to participate; the student's age; and protecting the safety of the students involved.

A transgender student who expresses a need or desire for increased privacy should be provided with reasonable alternative arrangements [like the use of a private area, or a separate changing schedule, or use of a single stall restroom].³ (underline emphasis added by author)

Many of the policies require that gender identity be, for example, "consistently and uniformly asserted at school" and not simply a momentary feeling.⁴ When Fairfax County schools in Virginia adopted a transgender non-discrimination policy, it included a vetting process for students in order to claim transgender

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status. Guidelines like these suggest finding a balance between the needs of a transgender student population and all other student populations.

Christian educators in public schools may face difficult days, but we know when the darkness becomes darker, our light will shine even brighter. Every day, "Gideons", confused about their identity, walk into our classrooms. We hold the high privilege of partnering with the Holy Spirit to carve away the marble and set them free to become all that God intended.