



September 26, 2022

The Virginia School Counselor Association (VSCA) opposes the Virginia Department of Education's *2022 Model Policies on the Privacy, Dignity, and Respect for All Students and Parents in Virginia's Public Schools* as they are currently proposed. The 2022 model policies create barriers to privacy, dignity, and respect for Virginia's students and seek to undermine previous legislation (i.e., [§ 22.1-23.3. Treatment of transgender students: policies](#)) that works to create safe and supportive environments for our most vulnerable youth.

VSCA recognizes that:

- 56% of transgender youth reported a previous suicide attempt and 86% reported suicidality. School belongingness mitigates these risks and is a significant predictor variable for reducing suicidal ideation and attempts among transgender youth (Austin et al., 2020).
- Transgender and nonbinary youth whose schools prevent them from using the restrooms/locker rooms that best matched their gender identities were significantly more likely to be sexually assaulted, 26% for transgender males and 149% for transgender females (Murchison et al., 2019).
- 28% of transgender youth whose pronouns are not affirmed attempted suicide in the past year. In fact, when pronouns are respected, transgender youth attempted suicide at half the rate of those who did not have their pronouns respected (Trevor Project, 2020).
- Transgender adolescents experience significantly disproportionate levels of childhood abuse compared to cisgender adolescents and experience greater levels of homelessness as a result of being kicked out or abused (Thoma, 2021).
- Fewer than 2.5% of transgender youth re-transition to cisgender (Olson et al, 2022).

Virginia school counselors work to remove barriers and support the social, emotional, and mental health needs of all students. VSCA Ends Policies state that "Virginia School Counselors are committed to working with and advocating for marginalized groups, promote the mental health and wellness of all students, adhere to the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors, and actively work to dismantle destructive systemic inequities."

Additionally, Virginia school counselors follow the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) Position Statement on [The School Counselor and Transgender and Nonbinary Youth](#) (Adopted 2016, revised 2022) that states:

School counselors work to safeguard the well-being of transgender and nonbinary youth. School counselors recognize all students have the right to be treated equally and fairly, with dignity and respect as unique individuals, free from discrimination, harassment and bullying based on their gender identity and gender expression.

Finally, Virginia school counselors seek to create environments that are not only inclusive and equitable for all students, including our transgender, nonbinary, gender non-conforming and gender-fluid students, but that celebrate the full scope of their identities, allowing them to thrive and reach their fullest potential. Furthermore, Virginia school counselors commit to dismantling any and all forms of inequity in Virginia's public education system and fully support LGBTQ+ students. Every Virginia student, regardless of their gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation, has a right to learn free from discrimination and harassment.

Against this background, it is VSCA's stance that the *2022 Model Policies on the Privacy, Dignity, and Respect for All Students and Parents in Virginia's Public Schools* are empirically unfounded and are not in accordance with evidence-based best practices concerning the treatment of transgender, nonbinary, gender non-conforming and gender-fluid students.