

Safe and Inclusive Schools in Frederick County

Creating Welcoming and Affirming Schools for All Students: Understanding FCPS Policy 443

Every school in Maryland has a vital responsibility and a legal duty—to ensure that all students learn in environments that are safe, welcoming, and inclusive. When students don't feel secure or valued, their ability to learn and grow is deeply affected. As a community, we must stand together in our commitment to supporting schools that nurture every child's full academic, social, and emotional potential.

In 2017, students in Frederick County Public Schools (FCPS) took a powerful stand to ensure every school is a place where all students feel safe, respected, and supported—no matter their gender identity. Their advocacy led to the creation of **Policy 443: Creating Welcoming and Affirming Schools for Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students**.

Policy 443 is rooted in the belief that schools should be inclusive environments where discrimination, stigmatization, harassment, and bullying have no place. It was developed to affirm the rights of transgender and gender nonconforming students and to foster school cultures where every student can thrive.

How Policy 443 Works

Respecting Student Identity Students, including those who are non-binary (who do not identify exclusively as male or female), have the right to access school facilities—such as restrooms and locker rooms—that align with their gender identity.

Providing Safe Alternatives Any student who feels uncomfortable using a gender-segregated facility, for any reason, will be provided a safe and non-stigmatizing alternative. Importantly, these options are made available without invasive questions or complicated procedures.



“We left our friends, our family, everything we know in Texas and moved here **FOR** policies like 443. You can imagine my surprise and disappointment to once again see people politicizing, scapegoating and villainizing kids who just want to get through the school day unscathed.”

MANDI WOLFE
FCPS PARENT

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Research shows that students who feel safe and valued perform better in school, making this policy crucial for their well-being and success. Supporting Policy 443 means standing up for all children, affirming their right to be themselves, and ensuring they have equal opportunities to succeed.”

COREY FARLEY
FCPS Parent

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I have worked with a couple of transgendered students who were relieved that school was a safe space to be themselves. Policy 443 allowed them the safe space to be their authentic selves and made it clear that bullying because of this would not be tolerated.”

LAURA RHODERICK
FCPS LCSW-C School
Based Therapist

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As a parent and educator who sees firsthand how adults' decisions affect how children feel, perceive each other, and learn to treat each other, we must uphold and strengthen Policy 443.”

CHAD KING WILSON SR
FCPS Parent,
Current Educator
and Coach

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Policy 443 is a vital part of Frederick County, not just the public schools, but as a community. We need to continue to make our county a safe space for everyone, especially our students.”

ELIJAH STEELE
FCPS Senior,
Gov. Thomas Johnson HS,
Student Member FCPS Board
of Education

Policy 443

reflects FCPS's commitment to equity and inclusion. It is a reminder that every student deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, and that schools have a responsibility to uphold these values in both policy and practice. Together, as a community, we can support this vision by fostering understanding, compassion, and a shared commitment to creating welcoming environments for all students.

FAQs

Does this policy allow boys to use girls' restrooms?

Every student—regardless of gender, gender identity, or gender expression—deserves access to safe and affirming facilities. Any student who feels uncomfortable using a gender-segregated space for any reason will be offered a private, non-stigmatizing alternative. These accommodations are provided without question, delay, or unnecessary procedures.

How do schools ensure fairness in sports while also including trans athletes?

Excluding transgender people from sports harms everyone. It opens the door to gender policing, where anyone could be subjected to invasive scrutiny or accused of being “too masculine” or “too talented” based on subjective measures. Trans athletes, like their cisgender peers, vary widely in skill and ability—and they deserve the same opportunity to participate in sports with dignity and respect.

Does the school ever keep information about a student's identity private from parents?

Schools keep students' preferred names and pronouns private to protect their safety, privacy, and emotional well-being. It also supports a respectful, inclusive learning environment and honors students' rights to autonomy and confidentiality. Students use different names for a variety of reasons—whether it's shortening a long first name, preferring their middle name, avoiding frequent mispronunciations, being a junior, or choosing a name that better reflects their identity. When teachers communicate with families, they use the legal name on record.



Learn More!

Visit the FCPS Board of Education website to watch the video explainer and learn more about Policy 443.

