

August 17, 2023

Gabriel,

Here are the answers to the questions you submitted regarding the Pride flag in a Learn 4 Life classroom that is part of the EISD partnership with Learn 4 Life. Below are each of your questions, with the district's response.

Please let us know if you have any additional questions.

Thank you,
Lauren Blevins
Edgewood ISD
Dir. Marketing & Communications

What resources does the district have available for LGBTQ+ students looking for support at school?

- By law, all educational institutions who are recipients of federal funds follow the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights' definition of "sex" as interpreted by the United States Supreme Court's historic decision in *Bostock v. Clayton County*. Under this definition of sex, students cannot be discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity, nor can they be excluded from any District benefit or program because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The District applauds the *Bostock* decision and believes it is a step in the right direction
- All students have access to professional school counselors, Social Workers, as well as Communities in Schools counselors to support the many needs of our students. Our schools provide an inclusive safe environment that supports the healthy learning of all students. Depending on need, students may be referred to outside agencies such as the Thrive Youth Center, San Antonio Mobile Mental Wellness Collaborative or TCHATT. Other resources and information provided to all students are Trevor Project and GLAD as well as the [Bexar County Behavioral Health Resource Directory 2023](#)
- Moreover, the District's entire mission is to provide a welcoming, safe, and supportive environment where all students, including students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+), can obtain the education they need to become successful. To help accomplish this mission, the District trains its employees to identify students who may be struggling academically or emotionally. To prevent systemic harassment or discrimination against students on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, the District has enacted policies and procedures intended to prohibit, prevent, and remedy any harassment, discrimination or exclusion from any District program or benefit suffered by students on account of their sex. Additionally, the District's school counselors are trained to support the emotional needs of all students who may need help. All District campuses have counselors available for all students to speak at any time. The District wants all of its students to be successful. Some students need more support than others, and the District and its trained employees are here to help them succeed, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Do any of the schools in the district have a gay-straight alliance or similar LGBTQ+ support groups?

- The District encourages student support groups and other student-led organizations. Indeed, much like other community, civic, or non-profit groups, the District allows student support groups use of the facilities according to District policy. Currently, there are no gay-straight alliance or similar LGBTQ+. Nonetheless, the District encourages all of its students, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, to benefit from the leadership, communication, and collaborative skills and other benefits that may be derived from participating in student-led organizations. Currently, there is a LGTBQ+ support group which meets on campus. In the past, this group has met at JFK High School, but it is not clear if it has formed for this school year. SAGA (Student Access Gay Alliance) meets Wednesday after school at JFK.

Are teachers allowed to tell students who come to them struggling with their sexual orientation or gender identity that they are welcome in the school?

- The District trains its teachers to provide students the support or resources they may need to be comfortable in their educational environment. Additionally, District employees understand that all students, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, have their own unique perspectives and issues. District employees are not any less sensitive to a student's emotional needs simply because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Are teachers, admins, or counselors allowed to post stickers saying LGBTQ+ students are welcome there? These have been banned in many districts.

- The District carefully weighs an employee's rights to free speech with its obligations as an employer to run an efficient and conflict-free workplace. It is often neither an easy nor popular decision to make. However, at the District, our teachers' #1 priority is to impart the state-mandated curriculum to their students, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and to help place them on the path of academic and professional success. By law, the District is permitted to direct teachers to post or refrain from posting certain materials, depending on their relation to the curriculum. Under the District's content-neutral policy, all materials that are potentially political and unrelated to school curriculum are not allowed.

I'm still having trouble understanding what it means for teachers not to be able to express "personal political" viewpoints. The district's statement says it "fosters a diverse and inclusive learning environment that respects the rights and identities within our school community, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or transgender status." This statement of inclusivity expresses the same viewpoint as the display of the pride flag—namely, that LGBTQ+ students are welcome. How is the message the flag sends different?

- The District proudly stands by its statement of inclusivity. The District's mission is to provide a quality education to all students, regardless of their race, national origin, sex, disability or color. Moreover, the District recognizes that the perception of the pride flag can vary depending on the individual and the context. As a historical matter, the pride flag has its roots in the history of activism and advocacy for equality for all regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. This activism involves, in part, a movement that seeks changes in laws, policies and societal attitudes towards sexual orientation and gender identity. Thus, while reasonable minds may differ, the pride flag could be interpreted as an expression in support of certain changes in the law or policy and thus political expression. Ultimately, whether or not employees are allowed to hang flags expressing their personal political or societal views, the District values each and every one of its students, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or transgender status. The District honors and respects the never-ending fight for equality by trying its best to create an ideal educational environment for all students.

The fact that other political symbols, like the American flag, are permitted in classrooms suggests that the underlying restriction is not, in fact, about the expression of political beliefs. Why are American flags allowed?

- The District believes that the US flag is a symbol which represents justice and opportunity for all of Americans, regardless of their race, national origin, sex, disability or color. It represents the collective values, sacrifices and achievements of all Americans. Additionally, the District teaches its students that core American values--freedom, individualism, equality, justice, and progress--are inherently non-political. Finally, the District is required, and is proud to, prominently display the U.S. and Texas flags in each campus classroom.
- [Texas Education Code Section 25.082 – Pledges of Allegiance; Minute of Silence](#)

Is the district afraid the suspension sends the message that LGBTQ+ kids are not welcome? That being inclusive of them is a political position?

- The District wishes for its students, parents, staff, and all of the District community to understand that the recent suspension is not intended to send a message that LGBTQ+ kids are not welcome or that inclusivity is a political stance. All District students are welcome and for those who are struggling because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, we are here to help.
- Moreover, I would like to make it clear that the teacher in question is an employee of Learn 4 Life, not EISD and as such is not responsible nor can EISD respond to the actions taken by the teacher's employer.

###