

School Climate, Gender Identity & Expression *in* New York's Public Schools



The date was Sept. 24th 2010. I walked into my mom's room. I was in tears. I said, 'Mom, I'm not a girl, I'm a boy. If I have to continue living as a girl, I can promise that I won't live anymore.' I meant every single one of those words, If I had to keep living my life as a girl, I wouldn't have lived. Right after that my mom said okay, and we went out to buy boys clothes, and a week after I got my hair cut short. I slowly started coming out to my friends, and started coming out to people at school.

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**CHRIS,
16**

In addition to family and friends, schools have a unique and powerful opportunity to support transgender students. In fact, schools have a legal responsibility to do so. However, the rights of transgender and gender-nonconforming students are not always well-understood or respected by schools across New York State.

All too often, students are treated unfairly as a result.

CHRIS' STORY

When Chris started high school, officials did not fully support him in his transition. One major issue: Chris was denied access to the boys bathroom, which meant long days without relief – and recurring urinary tract infections. In Chris's own words, they were treating him more like an "it" than a boy.

Chris's mother Mary, alongside the NYCLU, advocated on his behalf. Eventually, the school took steps to ensure Chris was being treated like every other boy in school. In compliance with the law, Chris's school now calls him by his chosen name and uses male pronouns, and Chris has access to the boys bathroom and other sex-segregated facilities.

FAITH'S STORY



Faith knew that she wanted to use her high school's Homecoming as an opportunity to speak out on behalf of her transgender friend, Regina. With the support of her family, classmates and a local LGBTQ advocacy group, Faith, who identifies as female and lesbian, decided to run for "Homecoming King." This was her way of "standing up for [transgender people] and my friend."

Faith won in a landslide, as students overwhelmingly supported her message of inclusion. And when the local school board considered a rule that would limit "Homecoming King" to students assigned male at birth and "Homecoming Queen" to students assigned female at birth, Faith and her friends successfully defeated it, with an assist from the NYCLU, pointing out that such a rule would violate the law. Homecoming, of course, was a rousing success. As Faith reported, "it felt like everyone was on my side—we were united."

SHARE YOUR STORY

Like Chris and Faith, all students deserve to feel safe and supported in school.

In an effort to support transgender and gender-nonconforming students across New York, and in order to educate administrators and policymakers on the challenges faced by these students, the NYCLU is collecting stories from students, parents and educators. If you believe you are being discriminated against in school based on your gender identity or expression and want our help, or if you have an experience you would like to share with us for our Story Collection Project, please contact us.

You can email RHodgson@nyclu.org or LFrederico@nyclu.org to learn more about the project and to add your voice to the fight for equality, or if you have any questions about student rights.

Please Note: *The NYCLU respects and values confidentiality, and can work with you to document stories and experiences without revealing your identity, where you go to school or your home town.*



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