

AGIA – Arlington Gender Identity Allies

Letter to AGIA

Once again, I apologize for missing a deadline that I gave you for responding to your questions. I am working on my responses to those questions and will send them asap – but I want to tell you some things about my experience with these topics.

As a teacher I have direct experience with students who are working through their identity with respect to gender issues – students in my classroom. It is part of my work in building relationships with each and every student to engage and support them as become who they are. And it is also part of my job to create a classroom culture that values that personal development in each other – some very basic socialization skills were lost during the COVID outage. This has occasioned, sometimes frequently “Sermons from Brother Laurence” on the dignity we each possess, respect for each other’s own individuality, consideration for each other’s good/difficult days, and ways to help everyone that we are with to become the good person they want truly to be.

Issues related to gender identity, preference, exploration sometimes place a heavy burden on our students – emotionally, physically, socially, etc. – which means that we teachers need to put more effort into our relationship with them – an aspect of “equity” that I feel and embrace – and work with all educators to make part of our culture.

There are individual situations in which one of our students needs help with acceptance at home. The first responsibility educators have is to build our relationship with that student, listen carefully to them, and assure them of our acceptance of their way of being. Next, we need to work with councilors and other staff to make clear to those at home that our schools affirm their student’s way of being in school – explain the culture that APS fosters. Then, explain that we offer services to families for the resolution of acceptance issues – acknowledging our responsibility to parents and guardians too.

I have dealt with this issue in a different context. I am a member of a Quaker Meeting, Bethesda Friends Meeting. During my time as Clerk of the Ministry and Worship committee (more than a decade ago), I rewrote the Meeting's marriage policy, the "Minute on Marriage" – it now says, "The Meeting will solemnize the marriage between any two persons." This language was specifically chosen to include trans persons (not just "same sex" persons). It took patient and persistent efforts to win acceptance of this policy – in part because there was a member that was the parent of a person in the process of transitioning.

That member needed support from us to become accepting.

These values and my commitment to them are bedrock beliefs of who I am.

On school specific topics I will just now offer these thoughts (that I will endeavor to frame in responses to your questions):

Policies and their implementation (PIPs, etc.) are the responsibility of the School Board to make and enforce. The Board members must be diligent in investigations of compliance. These are basic to good governance.

All APS employees must be protected with respect to these issues.

All APS employees must attest to the creation of a culture that embraces these principles, policies, and implementations. Any employee who is not comfortable in the culture we are creating, should find another way of earning a living in which they do feel comfortable – HR should provide them assistance.

Politicians who use these issues for their benefit or the benefit of some divisive purpose are despicable.

I will advocate for these values. I will defy any action that is inconsistent with these values, or in any way opposes the culture we are creating. I will gladly sit in jail and advocate even louder!

I will use whatever influence I can muster to defeat the negative, regressive, divisive forces that yet lurk in the dark corners of our society.