TRANSGENDER EDUCATION NETWORK OF TEXAS

BACK TO SCHOOL TOOLKIT

A Resource Guide & Toolkit for Students, School Employees, and Families

UPDATED AUGUST 2026

TRANSGENDER EDUCATION NETWORK OF TEXAS

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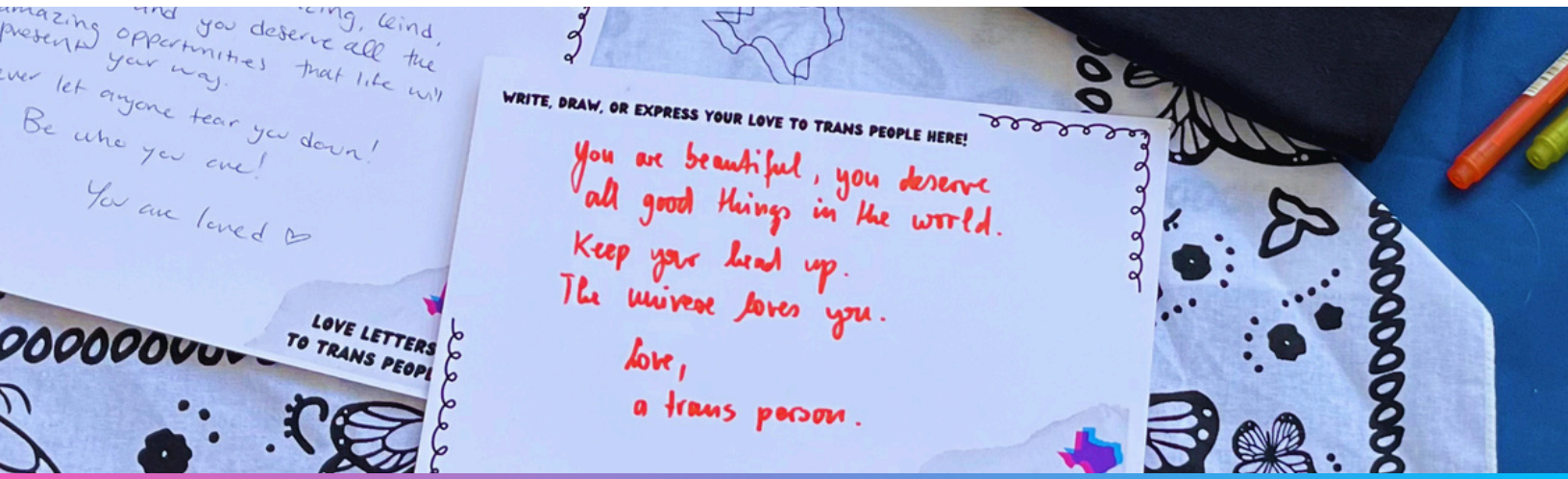


INTRODUCTION

Whether it be navigating new classroom dynamics, forging new relationships, or exploring self-expression, many young people experience uncertainty or anxiety at the start of a new school year. Public schools in Texas are often used as a political wager, and state policies like **Senate Bill 12 (SB 12)**, **Senate Bill 8 (SB 8)**, and **other bills** passed by the Texas Legislature in 2025, have large impacts on students' lives of and exacerbate the stress associated with back to school for transgender, gender-expansive (TGE), and queer students, their families, and the adults at school who care for them. Students' identities as TGE or queer may also overlap with other aspects of who they are, including culture, race, immigration status, neurodiversity, or physical (dis)ability, which can further exacerbate this uncertainty and anxiety.

Through combining elements of existing resources, like the **Texas Trans Kids "Free to Be Me" Toolkit**, a guide developed collaboratively by national and state organizations, including TENT, and the expertise of TENT's trans-led and focused policy work, our Back to School toolkit is intended to help equip students, parents and guardians, teachers and staff, and advocates. In this toolkit you will find information about relevant policies and laws impacting the public K-12 experience for trans, gender-expansive, and queer people, tools to navigate the classroom and advocate for the rights and dignity of TGE students and staff. TENT has created resources for when support is needed beyond campus, with advice for how to cultivate community, belonging, and self-expression beyond the classroom for youth in Texas. While this toolkit is oriented towards policies impacting TGE students and staff, resources which center transgender and gender-expansive student needs can benefit all students in accessing the resources they need to thrive in school and in their communities.

We know that the experiences of TGE and queer students, teachers, and families vary school to school, district to district, and city to city and that laws passed by the Texas Legislature are often intentionally vague, making implementation messy and resulting in entities skewing towards overcompliance. With this in mind, this guide does not attempt to be a one-size-fits-all document, instead offering a big-picture look at the intended impacts of certain policies and laws, pathways on how to navigate this landscape, and other tools to support TGE and queer youth safety, self-expression, and self-determination.

SENATE BILL 12

The Texas Student Identity Censorship Law

Senate Bill 12 (SB 12) became law in 2025, and targets students, teachers, and faculty in K-12 public and open-enrollment charter schools across Texas through banning GSAs, activities and programs that mention race, ethnicity, gender identity, or sexual orientation, prohibiting teachers from honoring the names and pronouns of their TGE students, granting parents and guardians near-total control over their student(s)' experience in school, and more. Overall, SB 12 fosters an environment that's hostile to all students, especially students of color and TGE and queer students, as well as teachers, staff, and families.

SB 12 Lawsuit Status

Shortly after SB 12 went into effect, the Transgender Law Center (TLC), the American Civil Liberty Union of Texas (ACLU of TX), the GSA Network, Students Engaged in Advancing Texas (SEAT), Texas American Federation of Teachers (AFT), as well as students and teachers from three school districts sued to block the law from being enforced. **In February of 2026, a federal judge issued a preliminary injunction blocking SB 12 from being enforced in the three school districts (Houston ISD, Plano ISD, and Katy ISD) where the plaintiffs went to school or worked.**

Four provisions of SB 12 were specifically challenged in the lawsuit and the judge blocked all four from implementation in these districts while litigation continues. The four (now blocked) provisions are:

INCLUSIVITY BAN (PROHIBITING INCLUSIVE PROGRAMS)

Ban on "developing or implementing policies, procedures, trainings, activities or programs that reference race, color, ethnicity, gender identity, or sexual orientation."

RESTRICTIONS ON SUPPORTING TGE STUDENTS

Prohibits any school employee from "assisting a student […] with social transitioning including by providing any information about social transitioning."

"DON'T SAY LGBTQ+" BAN

Prohibits providing or allowing third parties to provide—"instruction, guidance, activities, or programming regarding sexual orientation or gender identity to students…"

GSA BAN

Prohibits school districts from allowing any student clubs "based on sexual orientation or gender identity."

Although the preliminary injunction only applies to three specific school districts, the judge reminded all Texas school districts of their legal obligation to follow federal law in cases where state and federal law conflict (the Supremacy Clause of the United States Constitution).

With continuing litigation, students, school employees, and families are encouraged to document their experiences in school, especially in the districts in which SB 12 enforcement is blocked, and report instances of SB 12 enforcement to the ACLU of TX **legal complaint intake form**.

BREAKING DOWN SB 12

Student Clubs

SB 12 prohibits school districts from authorizing and sponsoring Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs, also known as Gay-Straight Alliances), Sexuality and Gender Alliances (SAGAs), and any other clubs specifically dedicated to supporting queer and trans students.

What does the lawsuit mean for clubs?

Even if you do not attend one of the three school districts covered by the injunction (Katy ISD, Houston ISD, Plano ISD), federal law still protects your right to assemble and your right to establish student groups like GSAs. In the particular case of student clubs, current federal law requires that all non-academic clubs be allowed to exist in public schools if any non-academic clubs are allowed.[1] School districts are also required to treat all clubs equally.

FOR STUDENTS

Tools for self-advocacy

If you plan to start or apply to renew a GSA at your school, here are some things to keep in mind:

1. **FOLLOW YOUR OWN SCHOOL'S PROCEDURES AND POLICIES.**
There are some restrictions on when applications can be submitted for new clubs, and these rules vary depending on the district. Applying to establish or renew your club within the allotted timeframe can reduce the chances of you receiving pushback from school administration.

2. **CHALLENGE DISCRIMINATION FROM YOUR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION.**
If you do face pushback from your administration, and especially if you're told that your club cannot exist because of SB 12, you can utilize your district's grievance processes to challenge the decision (more information included in the "Advocating for Yourself" section of this resource).

3. **THINK OUTSIDE OF THE BOX.**
Your power is your creativity; the language in SB 12 means the ban impacts clubs "relating to race, gender identity, and sexual orientation during and after school." If your school does not allow you to start a GSA or a SAGA, you may have to think outside of the box. Do you and your friends have a shared hobby? Is there already an art club at your school? Or could students like yourself and your friends create one?

4. **FIND YOUR ADULT ALLIES.**
Despite Texas' best efforts to silence and punish supportive school employees, they do exist and want to help.

5. **CARVE OUT ALTERNATIVE SPACES FOR COMMUNITY AND SUPPORT.**
Is there a place off campus that's accessible to you and your peers? Think LGBTQIA+ community centers, coffee shops, malls, parks, someone's home, an affirming place of worship, etc. Sometimes it may be safer or less of an administrative burden than starting a GSA on your campus. In these situations, you may decide to utilize other public spaces for your meetings and programming. Even if you aren't authorized through your school, you can still **register your GSA with and receive support from the National GSA Network**. If you have questions about organizing outside of your school, don't hesitate to reach out to us at **support@transtexas.org**.

[1] See 20 U.S.C. § 4071(a), the Equal Access Act.

SUPPORTING TRANS AND GENDER EXPANSIVE STUDENTS

The "Social Transition Ban"

In addition to stripping students of access to safe and affirming spaces at school, SB 12 also ***aims*** to ban teachers and other school or district employees from "assisting" a student with social transitioning, and "providing any information about social transitioning or providing guidelines intended to assist a person with social transitioning."

SB 12 does not clearly define what "assisting" means in the context of social transitioning. This vagueness has not only been deemed unconstitutional, but has led to school districts interpreting and implementing this provision in different ways, regardless of whether a parent is supportive of their student's chosen name/pronouns.

SB 12 emboldens district employees or any parent with a child enrolled in the school district to report suspected violations of this ban on "assisting" a student with their social transition. This means that any parent with an enrolled student in the school district can file a grievance with the district about a child that is not their own, resulting in and encouraging a culture of surveillance, distrust, and violations of privacy.

What does the lawsuit (and existing law) mean for TGE students?

While on paper SB 12 aims to ban "assisting" with a student's social transition and to punish school staff who support trans and gender-expansive students, both state and federal law protect the rights of students to have their chosen names and pronouns respected in school. **The Transgender Law Center and the ACLU of Texas, as well as the federal judge who issued the preliminary injunction, have all reminded school districts that federal laws still protect the rights of trans and gender-expansive students to have their names and pronouns respected at school.**

These rights are stipulated in federal law, specifically in the Family Educational Rights Privacy ACT (FERPA), Title IX, and the U.S. Constitution.[2] State law, namely the Texas Education Code, only requires schools to identify students by their legal surnames on official documentation and records, meaning that there is no legal requirement to exclusively use a student's legal first name on non-official documents and records, in class, at all school events, in yearbooks, and in clubs.[3]

[2]See footnotes 30, 31, and 32 in the Transgender Law Center and ACLU of Texas' "**Notice Regarding S.B. 12's Social Transition Ban**" letter.
[3] Tex. Educ. Code §25.0021.

FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

Tools for self-advocacy

When SB 12 went into effect in the fall of 2025, the Transgender Law Center and ACLU of Texas sent a letter to superintendents across Texas urging them to follow federal and state laws protecting the rights and dignity of TGE students in Texas, particularly around name and pronoun usage in the classroom. If your teachers or other school or district staff are refusing to honor your name and pronouns, you may send this letter as a reminder. You can also reference in any formal complaint proceedings (if you decide to formally challenge an action from your school or district). More information about navigating your school district's grievance process can be found in the "Advocating for Yourself" section of our resource. The letter from TLC and ACLU of TX can be accessed **here**.

If you or your child are experiencing SB 12-related discrimination, please reach out to us at support@transtexas.org. If we are unable to directly support you, we will help connect you to an organization better equipped to do so.

The following provisions were not challenged in the lawsuit, but that does not mean they're not violations of the autonomy of all youth.

Parent Access and Control

SB 12 grants parents near-total access to their child's school records, including what library books they check out, what counseling services they seek and receive, what information they learn in the classroom, and what activities they take part in. This law also affords parents and guardians the ability to completely opt their children out of receiving instruction and activities regarding health education, sexual orientation, and gender identity, among other topics. By requiring written parental consent for a student's participation in human sexuality instruction, access to mental health resources, certain services offered by the school nurse, access to certain library materials, and participation in clubs, SB 12 has already caused schools, teachers, and other school employees to completely avoid providing services or LGBTQIA+ inclusive instruction to students out of fear that they will face consequences. These consent requirements have caused **massive amounts of confusion** about how or when staff can act in emergencies, or when a parent or guardian cannot be reached. The impacts of this provision have been felt by all students, not just TGE and queer youth.

Parent Notification

SB 12 instructs school districts to "notify the parent of a student enrolled in the district regarding any change in services provided to or monitoring of the student related to the student's mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being." This is a concern due to the potential for school employees to interpret this to require them to out students to their parents, even though it does not.

SB 12 does not mandate "the disclosure of information to a parent if a reasonably prudent person would believe the disclosure is likely to result in the student suffering abuse or neglect." ***As such, information about a student's LGBTQIA+ status is not required to be disclosed to their parent(s) or guardian(s) since it could result in adverse treatment of the student.***

FOR EDUCATORS AND SCHOOL EMPLOYEES

Tools for self-advocacy

Despite the existence of state and federal protections and interventions by legal experts, we know that schools are continuing to perpetuate harm against trans and gender-expansive students, denying them basic dignity and respect in the classroom, and are making it difficult for teachers and staff to mitigate that harm. Additionally, because SB 12 has been implemented in such a patchwork manner, and because of the chilling effect on instruction, discussion, and displaying support/allyship, there has been confusion and uncertainty around what ways teachers and staff can still support their students without risking their jobs or the safety of their students.

TLC, ACLU of TX, and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Texas Chapter created a resource regarding the rights of educators and school employees in the wake of SB 12 and what steps to take if your rights have been violated. You can access that resource **here**.

Educators and school employees have rights and protections that can't be negated by SB 12, and access to legal recourse and support if those rights are being infringed.

SENATE BILL 8

The Texas "Facilities Ban"

Senate Bill 8 (SB 8) became law in 2025 and targets transgender, gender-expansive, and intersex Texans by requiring that all people use multi-occupancy restrooms, locker rooms, shower rooms, and sleeping quarters according to sex assigned at birth in buildings owned, operated, or controlled by state agencies, political subdivisions, and institutions of higher education. ***SB 8 restrictions apply in K-12 and open-enrollment charter schools, as well as public school buildings other than the schools themselves (i.e., district administrative buildings, athletics facilities, stadiums, etc.).***

The impacts of SB 8 extend beyond public K-12 and open-enrollment charter schools but for the intention of our back to school resource tool kit this section only covers information about SB 8 that's most relevant for the public school context. You can find a full breakdown of SB 8 **here**.

BREAKING DOWN SB 8

SB 8 does not apply to single-stall facilities, meaning these are not required to be sex-segregated, even in government-owned buildings, like public schools. Single-stall restrooms that are labeled as either "male" or "female" don't carry the same restrictions on who can use them.

There are fines associated with SB 8 noncompliance, but these fines are applied only to the government-owned entities found to have not enforced SB 8 (in this context, schools or school districts). The penalty for the first violation is a $25,000 fine, and $125,00 for every subsequent violation.

The fines are not and cannot be applied to individuals who are accused of using the "incorrect" facility.

SB 8 also heavily relies on people reporting suspected violations to the Attorney General, creating conditions where it's not only acceptable, but encouraged, to police people's bodies and gender expression. This heightened scrutiny of how people express themselves not only negatively impacts trans and gender-expansive people, but also cisgender people who don't conform to rigid gender stereotypes.

Nothing in SB 8 requires anyone to "prove" that they are using the "correct" facility. SB 8 also does not require people to demand that someone provide "proof." Additionally, it is illegal to photograph or capture video of an individual inside of a restroom. SB 8 does not make that behavior permissible.

Navigating Facility Restrictions

As TGE students navigate restrooms, locker rooms, changing rooms, and other sex-segregated facilities on school or school district property, remember that trans students are always entitled to safety, dignity, respect, and privacy. Below are some things to keep in mind when dealing with restrictive facility policies.

Privacy is Your Right

Being forced to use the restroom or changing facility based on your sex assigned at birth can constitute a violation of your privacy rights under FERPA. Using incongruent facilities can draw increased attention, invite invasive questions and speculation, and result in being "outed" to peers and school faculty. Forcing students to use facilities based on sex assigned at birth, or separate facilities altogether, can also lead to or worsen bullying and harassment.

Your privacy is protected in federal and state law beyond FERPA. Your right to privacy includes your right to not disclose personal, private medical history, your gender history, your legal history as it pertains to your gender journey, or any other aspect of your trans, gender-expansive, or intersex status. If you are asked by a peer, a teacher, or any other school employee about your gender, your medical history, the status of your documents, or any other question aimed at getting you to disclose your TGE status, ***you do not have to answer them***.

Seeking and Advocating for Accommodations

Some students and their families determine that requesting to use a student single-stall, nurse, or faculty restroom or changing facility at your school is the safest and most comfortable option. If that's the case, you can have a discussion with your school administration about this accommodation. In the Advocating for Yourself portion of this toolkit, we address how families can navigate conversations with your school administration and how to approach your school district's formal complaint process if you continue to face pushback, discrimination, or harm.

For families: if you need assistance navigating accommodations (such as a 504 plan) for your student, you can reach out to us at support@transtexas.org.

Keeping Each Other Safe

While it may not always be possible to go to the restroom or locker room with a friend, there is safety in numbers. Friends can help us offset anxiety about facing harassment, transphobia, xenophobia, and anti-blackness, etc., and, on a practical level, as loved ones and buddies can help document and/or push back in unjust situations.

ADVOCATING FOR YOURSELF: NAVIGATING YOUR SCHOOL'S COMPLAINT PROCESS

Although laws and policies are in place that impact the ability of TGE and and queer students to exist authentically in school, TGE and queer students still have rights and autonomy. There are still ways for students, families, and allies to push back against mistreatment and discrimination faced in school.

This section of TENT's toolkit will dive into how to navigate a hostile climate and restrictive policies (as well as cooperative and sympathetic ones). Additional resources included in other sections of the Back to School toolkit dive into more interpersonal mental health/support resources for young people, and tools more specifically geared towards parents, guardians, and caregivers.

Document, Document, Document!

When dealing with discrimination or mistreatment based on gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation (i.e., your GSA/SAGA was told it would not be approved this school year, your teacher refuses to respect your name and/or pronouns, your school administration does not work to establish reasonable accommodations for restroom or locker room usage, etc.), it is critical to document everything that happens. Keep a written record of what you or someone you know experienced, including when the instance of discrimination or mistreatment occurred, a timeline of events if the discrimination or mistreatment is occurring/has occurred over a period of time, who perpetrated it, what exactly occurred, and what steps, formal or informal, you have taken to defend yourself. You should also keep a record of what responses you have received throughout the process.

Having a comprehensive record of these experiences can be extremely helpful if you choose to pursue administrative action (filing a complaint, grievance, etc.), or if you decide to contact an advocacy or legal organization.

Maintaining a record is also important in cases of bullying or harassment at school. The more evidence you have (including screenshots of texts, direct messages, etc.), the stronger your case will be if/when you are able to report the bullying or harassment.

Taking an Informal Route

Not every issue requires escalating to a formal complaint as the first step. Often, a resolution can be reached at the school level (with administrators, your principal, your counselor, your teacher) over the course of a meeting or email exchange. It's also crucial to remember that not every situation requires us to immediately approach with our guard up or from the assumption that opposition is inevitable. Sometimes, entering an interaction from the offensive can result in apprehension from the other party to work together towards a solution. However, this does not mean you should approach these situations without preparation or a backup plan. Remember, you have allies, and you have options.

In preparation for your meeting with the principal (or other school administrator), you can write a script or bullet points outlining what your concern is and what you hope to achieve through your meeting. Bring these notes with you and don't hesitate to reference them in the moment! It's completely acceptable to read from your device or a piece of paper if it will help you recount your experience and clearly state your expectations.

If you're sending an email, include relevant details so that the recipient knows what happened/is happening, and clearly state how you want the issue to be resolved. It's also helpful to ask for a response by a specific deadline, and communicate your intention to file a formal complaint if you don't receive a response before the established deadline.

Continue documenting your experience as you go through this process, especially taking note of when you receive a response (and whether you receive one), what the response entails, and whether your requests and needs are met. Writing things down also relieves the pressure of having to remember details later on.

Taking Formal Action: Filing a Complaint

When should you consider filing a complaint with your school district?

- Your request for a meeting or for assistance from your principal or other school administrator was ignored, unsuccessful, or not addressed by the established deadline.
- Your concern was initially addressed, but the issue was not adequately resolved and you are still experiencing the harm you thought had been rectified.
- You've attempted to reach solutions through informal channels in the past and have been met with hostility or indifference.

As opposed to attempting to resolve issues informally at your individual school level, formal complaints require the school district to listen and respond to you. Filing a formal complaint doesn't guarantee you'll receive the desired outcome, and it may be the case that your school district engages with you throughout the process as a formality, but ultimately cites a law (or laws) as the reason your issue cannot be resolved (whether or not the actions at issue are actually required by law). Formal avenues like complaints are still open and ensure that there is a written record of behavior from school staff and/or treatment of the student.

FILING A COMPLAINT: STEPS AND TIPS

STEP 1: FINDING YOUR ISD'S GRIEVANCE POLICIES

Every school district has a different complaint process. Your school district's policies are available on the ISD website and the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) database. An easy way of locating this information is by searching your school district's name followed by "TASB" and "policy."

Understanding Where to Look

The legal and technical language on your school district's policy page can make navigating the process overwhelming. Here are some helpful tips for reading and understanding school district policy:

- "Local" policies are those that are adopted by the school district. You will most likely be navigating one (or a combination) of the following:
  - FFH: discrimination and harassment
  - FFI: bullying
  - FNG: your district's complaint process
- "Legal" policies outline what the applicable laws are in a given area.

Filing Deadlines

When considering whether to file a complaint, read these policies closely, and pay close attention to the deadlines within which you must file your complaint, file an appeal, etc. Most FNG (local) policies require filing a complaint within 10 or 15 business days from when you first knew of or were on the receiving end of the action or decision at issue. *This is why it's crucial to document everything.*

Depending on your specific school district's policy, it's generally best to file a complaint within two or three weeks of the first instance of discrimination, harassment, bullying, etc. Deadlines can be extended if the behavior/treatment at issue is ongoing, and you may be able to file a complaint based on the most recent occurrence if the first instance occurred outside of the standard filing deadline.

What Type of Complaint Should I File?

There are two types of complaints you can file: Level One and Level Two.

Level One complaints are those filed with the principal and address issues that stem from campus decisions or actions. Level Two complaints bypass the principal and go straight to the school district superintendent and challenge decisions made at/enforced by the district itself. Being familiar with what policies are district-wide vs school-specific will help you determine which complaint is the most appropriate to file.

STEP 2: FILING A COMPLAINT

You should be able to find the appropriate grievance form to fill out by searching key words (like "grievance" or "complaint form") on your school district's website. Results for different types of complaints may pop up - locate the one specifically for students/parents. In your complaint, include as much detail as possible, including supplementary information/evidence like documents, photographs, screenshots, etc.

Think back to the section of this resource about documentation. Include who, what, where, when, why, how, and all other relevant information about the event at issue. Be sure to include what resolution you are hoping to reach (there are no limits on what relief you can seek). You may also decide to include relevant legal language, state and federal laws and policies protecting TGE and queer students, and/or findings from studies or reports that support the need for your request to be met.[4] *These pieces are not necessary, but can help educate members of the school or school district administration who may be willing to receive such education.*

Grievance Hearings

After you submit your complaint, the recipient (principal or superintendent, depending on the level of complaint), has to respond within ten business days to schedule your conference (meeting). This meeting is an opportunity for you to share more about what you're experiencing/have experienced, and to verbalize what you want your school or school district to do in response. You may ask for this meeting to be recorded, if it is not already established at the beginning that it will be recorded.

After your conference, the district is required to respond, in writing, with their decision. However, they don't have to respond until up to 10 business days after the hearing. You may receive a response sooner, and depending on the school, school district, or individual administrators involved, and you may have a chance to work collaboratively with them on how to resolve the issues at hand while the process is ongoing.

Remember, these hearings are opportunities for you to share more about your experience, your story, and provide any additional information, evidence, or supporting materials that you could not include in the written complaint. If you have questions about what kind of information might be helpful to share during your grievance hearing, please feel free to reach out to us at **support@transtexas.org** and we'd be happy to help you strategize and prepare.

Some examples of supporting documents/supplementary information you could consider sharing (depending on the situation) can include:

- Any accommodations you or your student have
  - If you would like assistance navigating accommodations for your student, you can reach out to us at **support@transtexas.org**.
- **Data from the Trevor Project** around the importance of supportive school environments for TGE and queer youth.
- The **TLC and ACLUTX letter** regarding students' names and pronouns
- Letters of support from a doctor or therapist (backing the need for accommodations, the impact of discrimination, harassment, mistreatment)
- A **fact sheet** from TLC and ACLUTX regarding SB 12, or any other law that is being used as the basis for the treatment at issue.

All of these resources are included in the Additional Resources portion of this guide.

[4]The Trevor Project's 2024 **U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People in Texas** is an example of a resource you could use to support the case for your requested resolution.

STEP 3: YOUR RIGHT TO APPEAL

Be sure to carefully read your school district's policies and procedures around initiating an appeal. *All districts do have policies in place that allow for students and families to appeal a grievance up to the school board.* Whether in an open or closed hearing, the school board is required by state law to take a position on your issue through a vote, and if the school board ultimately decides against you, you may choose to pursue accountability for the school district through legal action.

You generally have **10 business days** from receiving the written grievance response to file an appeal. In your appeal, you can include information previously stated in your other filed grievance(s), and you may choose to respond to/address specific arguments or reasoning provided by the principal, superintendent, or other district officials in the written response(s) or the previous hearing(s).

A hearing will then be scheduled at the subsequent level. When appealing to **Level Two**, the meeting typically must be scheduled within 10 business days of you filing the appeal. Scheduling a Level Three hearing (Level Three is the school board) usually depends on the school board meeting schedule. You are, however, still entitled to a hearing.

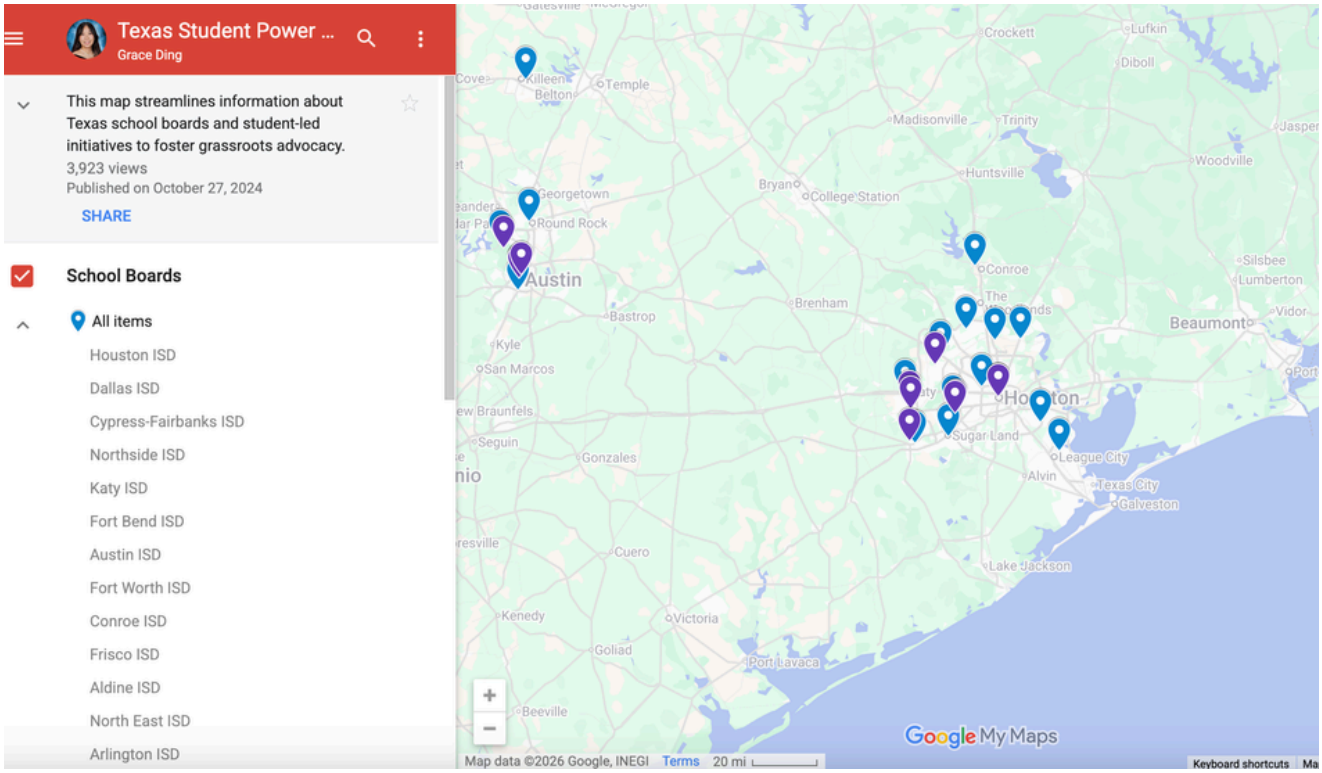
When pursuing an appeal to **Level Three**, you can choose to have a closed or open hearing. In a closed session, the general public is not allowed to sit in, whereas open meetings are accessible by members of the public and the media. If the matter is sensitive, or something you and your family would rather navigate as privately as possible, you may choose to have a closed hearing. Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy ACT (FERPA), your school district may not disclose personally identifiable information (PII) without your permission, so having a closed meeting before the school board ensures that that information is kept confidential.

In an open meeting, the public and the media are allowed to witness and participate in the proceedings. Some students and families may request an open meeting so that supporters and other impacted students and/or families can provide testimony in support of your complaint during the meeting's public comment period. School board meetings are also often recorded and available to view on the district's website. Keep this in mind as you prepare to provide testimony or to support others in sharing their stories. Use your best judgement when determining what information to share and how much.

School Board Tool: SEAT's *Texas Students Power Map*

Students Engaged in Advancing Texas (SEAT), a student-led and focused movement that works across Texas and the nation to ensure youth are not just represented in, but integral to the educational policymaking process, created the Texas Students Power Map, a tool that streamlines information about Texas school boards and student-led initiatives to foster grassroots advocacy.

In this resource, you can find information about 29 school boards across Texas, including where and how often meetings take place, where to watch meeting livestreams, where to find meeting agendas, how to sign up to speak, and what procedures you need to know if you're planning on testifying. All school districts in Texas have this information online, and if you don't see your school district represented, you can request an addition or suggest an edit to SEAT at team@studentsengaged.org.



K-12 ADVOCACY ROAD MAP

You have been impacted by transphobia in your K-12 school. Now what?

SEEK SAFETY AND SECURITY FOR YOURSELF AND/OR THOSE IMPACTED

In school settings, transphobic peers and decisionmakers are most successful in inflicting harm when they are allowed to **single out** supportive students, educators, and staff. Remember, there is strength in numbers. Identify and seek out the support of your community, loved ones, your friend group, and allies in your school to troubleshoot how you can establish physical and emotional safety for yourself and/or those impacted. **When you have been able to establish safety and support, start a document with information about what you experienced.**

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE MAKING THE DECISION TO RESPOND

Is this a new school environment entirely? Have you experienced similar situations at your school in the past? If so, what response(s) have you received from school administration, individual teachers/staff, or peers? Have you attempted to resolve this issue informally? Have you already reviewed your student handbook/school district policies to determine your options for recourse? Have you reviewed the resources in this packet?

WHEN CONSIDERING WHETHER TO FILE A FORMAL COMPLAINT

If you have exhausted all informal avenues, or there is precedent for the need to escalate to a formal complaint as the first step, refer to the "**Advocating for Yourself: Filing a Formal Complaint**" section of this toolkit.

EXPAND BEYOND YOUR SCHOOL

Identify safe places and resources beyond your school that are unapologetically pro-trans/queer. As you navigate through your issue and troubleshoot a stressful situation, seek out sanctuaries like supportive community spaces, such as outspoken small businesses, public libraries with supportive staff, or friends' homes. Share these resources with others as a matter of community care!

STAY PROACTIVE: REACH OUT TO US

Even if you are dealing with a "worst case" scenario and you are in an unsupportive environment, you have allies in TENT and our legal partners. Reach out to us by sending us an email to support@transtexas.org.

REMEMBER: It is important to take steps as an educator, administrator, and parent or guardian to center students and other vulnerable individuals. Prioritize alleviating pressure on them and yourself.

FAMILY RESOURCES

The following resources are intended to help families navigate heightened state scrutiny, especially as state agencies have been weaponized against supportive parents and guardians of TGE youth.

Additional resources, such as those geared towards providing peer support to families, can be found in the ***Referenced and Additional Resources*** section of this toolkit.

If you are in need of any additional assistance, resources, or support, please email support@transtexas.org.

DOE V. ABBOTT AND PFLAG V. ABBOTT: WHERE DO PROTECTIONS FOR TEXAS FAMILIES STAND?

Updated May 4th, 2026

In 2022, Attorney General Ken Paxton authored an opinion equating life-saving medical care for trans youth with child abuse. Governor Abbott then directed the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to investigate affirming families of trans youth. Even though Attorney General opinions are not law, do not create nor amend law, and do not carry the force of law (and therefore cannot designate affirming a trans youth as being child abuse), DFPS opened investigations into Texas families for alleged child abuse on the basis that they supported their child(ren).

Two lawsuits were filed—*Doe v. Abbott and PFLAG v. Abbott*—to prevent DFPS from continuing to investigate supportive families of trans and gender-expansive youth. PFLAG National, Lambda Legal, the ACLU of Texas, and ACLU National sued and won legal injunctions that afforded families of trans youth protection from being investigated by the State. All families who were members of PFLAG were automatically covered by the PFLAG v. Abbott injunction.

After more than four years of investigations being blocked, on April 24, 2026, the Supreme Court of Texas (SCOTX) dismissed the injunctions. This move, as emphasized by our legal partners, is purely procedural and does not mean that DFPS's rule requiring investigations is lawful. The injunctions were dismissed because the plaintiffs (the families on whose behalf the lawsuits were filed) no longer needed the injunctions, as DFPS had closed their investigations and testified that cases would not be reopened because the youth are no longer minors.

This SCOTX ruling does not make supporting trans and gender-expansive youth child abuse and does not grant DFPS the permissison, nor direct DFPS to launch new investigations into other families.

Visit the links below for more information about the two cases challenging the DFPS investigations and illegal directive from the Governor. These cases are actively ongoing:

- ***Doe v. Abbott***
- ***PFLAG v. Abbott***

If you are contacted by Texas DFPS or CPS related to medical care or otherwise support for your trans youth, please reach out to one of the below legal help desks immediately and email support@transtexas.org:

- ***Transgender Law Center***
- ***Lambda Legal***
- ***ACLU of Texas***

INTERACTING WITH CPS

For TGE Students

IF A CPS INVESTIGATOR APPROACHES YOU AT YOUR SCHOOL...

- You can tell them to go away
- You can refuse to speak to them
- You can tell them to not take your picture
- You can start talking with them and tell them to stop later

IF YOU WANT TO SPEAK TO CPS, YOU CAN...

- Tell CPS your name
- Tell CPS you feel safe at home
- Tell CPS no one is sexually abusing you
- Tell CPS you get food to eat when you are hungry
- Tell CPS you get medical care when you need it
- Tell CPS you are done talking, and if they want to speak with you again to contact your parent or guardian or your attorney.

SAMPLE SCRIPT

"My name is _____. I **do not consent** to being interviewed by you. I am done communicating with you."

After your interaction, contact your parent(s) or guardian(s) as soon as possible. Parents and guardians should reach out to one of the below legal help desks immediately and email support@transtexas.org:

- ***Transgender Law Center***
- ***Lambda Legal***
- ***ACLU of Texas***

A version of these resources intended for easy distribution can be accessed here.

FAMILY SAFE FOLDERS

NOTE: Use your best judgement in discerning when to reference information in your safe folder versus when to not. Not every situation warrants you trying to defend yourself/your family or prove your innocence, and instead can result in a greater risk of harm. Sometimes, it's better to maintain privacy or remove yourself from a situation completely instead of producing official documents detailing your/your child's personal and medical history.

If you feel uncertain about an interaction, please don't hesitate to reach out to support@transtexas.org.

What is a "Safe Folder"?

A **"Safe folder"** is a collection of documents that are assembled in a binder, folder, or alternative data storage means (such as a flash drive) that will be useful in protecting your family and educating others. The contents of your folder can serve as a "road map" of your child's life, providing the reader with the history and facts needed to understand your child's gender identity and your family stability. It can also provide supporting education for those who may not understand how gender identity is developed or how it can differ from assigned birth sex. ***Your safe folder can protect you in situations of child abuse allegations, which is a tactic often used by extremists against supportive parents. By law, CPS is required to respond to all reports of child abuse.***

Despite the recent Supreme Court of Texas (SCOTX) decision to dismiss the injunctions which blocked DFPS from investigating families because of their support for their trans and/or gender expansive youth, **supporting trans and gender-expansive youth *is still not child abuse* and the decision does not grant DFPS the permission, nor direct DFPS to launch new investigations into other supportive families.**

YOU SHOULD HAVE AT LEAST TWO IDENTICAL COPIES OF YOUR SAFE FOLDER:

- One copy to remain in your home
- Another copy in a safe place away from your home in case of fire, flood, etc.
- (Optional): A digital copy on a flash drive, easy-to-carry if need be

All copies should be consistently updated with new items.

YOUR SAFE FOLDER SHOULD INCLUDE:

- A letter from your pediatrician/general practitioner confirming your child's gender identity.
- A letter from your child's therapist/counselor confirming your child's gender identity and confirming the stability of your family.
- A letter from any other healthcare professionals that your child is involved with confirming your child's gender identity.
- Letters from at least three (3) friends, family members, or your pastor/minister that confirm your child's atypical gender behaviors and testimony of your parenting abilities.
- Letters should state how they know you, the length of time they have known you, and the pattern of atypical gender behaviors that they have witnessed with your child, along with current contact information for the writer.
- Drawings or writings from your child that display their gender identity. (Example: Natal males drawing themselves as princesses or natal females drawing themselves as soldiers)
- Videos or snapshots of your child displaying atypical gender behaviors. (Chronological order; new pictures added every six months or more frequently as significant developmental changes happen for the child)
- Legal Documents (copy of birth certificate, passports, social security cards, and name change documents if applicable)
- Home study documenting family stability (If available).
- State Department of Justice, Bureau of Criminal Information/Analysis (searches Child Abuse Central Index) for parents (If available).

CRISIS HOTLINES

If you or someone you know is in crisis or needs mental health support, utilize and/or share the resources below:

LGBTQIA+ Specific Hotlines

Immediate Crisis

The Trevor Project

- Call 866-488-7386
- Text 'START' to 678-678

Non-Reporting Emergency Support Resources*

*These lines DO NOT contact law enforcement or other agencies without your consent

- **Trans Lifeline**: Call 877-565-8860
- **LGBT National Hotline**: Call 888-843-4564
- **LGBT National Youth Talkline**: Call 800-246-7743
- **THRIVE Lifeline**: Text "THRIVE" to (313) 662-8209
- **BlackLine** - run by BIPOC folks, for BIPOC folks: Call 800- 604-5841

General Crisis Hotlines

- **Crisis TextLine**: Text "START" to 741-741
- **Teen Line**: 1-800-852-8336, Text "TEEN" to 839863
- **National Domestic Violence Hotline**: 1-800-799-7233
- **National Sexual Assault Hotline**: 1-800-656-4673
- **National Drug and Alcohol Treatment Hotline**: 1-844-289-0879

A version of these resources intended for easy distribution can be accessed at here. If you are in need of any additional mental health support, or assistance navigating resources, please email support@transtexas.org.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Keeping Each Other Safe Requires Safeguarding Our Access to Knowledge

Faced with an onslaught of attacks on transgender students and educators, as well as institutions of higher education, TENT remains committed to providing up to date information on how to organize, respond, and fight back against censorship. From targeted lawsuits, shuttered art exhibitions, to blanket censorship and hyper-surveillance, we want people to feel empowered to respond in their learning communities.

Texas has been an infamous leader among states enforcing historical censorship on transgender topics through lawsuits, budget cuts, firings, monitoring of curriculum, and even closing historic departments.

Transgender people are everywhere in Texas - including our schools and places of higher learning. We are not going anywhere.

Safeguarding Community Knowledge

TAILOR YOUR COMMUNITY RESPONSE.

Student-led groups have organized teach-ins, “know your rights" presentations, and leaned on supportive community spaces to preserve trans knowledge. Professors and staff have organized alongside students to protect critical courses, supported individuals who have become targets of conservative backlash, and sought legal support when necessary.

KNOW THE ALLIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

It is more important than ever to create and grow relationships that can sustain your learning and important work.

IS YOUR STUDENT OR FACULTY GROUP LOOKING FOR A PLACE TO MEET?

Check out our **Star Guide** which houses information on places across Texas showing up for learning communities. Additions to this map are welcome!

PRACTICE GOOD DIGITAL SAFETY.

Check out our Digital Safety guide **here**.

KEEP TABS ON OUR TENT GUIDANCE AND TOWN HALLS.

TENT strives to keep our communities in the know about the latest in trans policy and advocacy. We frequently host virtual town halls to respond to community concerns. You may also request a tailored talk or “know your rights” presentation by reaching out to us at **info@transtexas.org**.

MAP YOUR CAMPUS FOR ACCESS!

Students, staff, and faculty are increasingly creating maps that contain information about whether to locate accessible and gender inclusive bathrooms on campus. See an example **here**.

Get in contact with TENT if you have questions or concerns

If you have experienced any harassment or hardship regarding IDs, schools, healthcare, or otherwise navigating public life as a TGE person, or if you have questions about how current laws and policies may impact you, **please reach out to us at support@transtexas.org to get connected with resources.**

Seeking Legal Assistance

Report discrimination and/or overcompliance with anti-trans laws, or other laws impacting higher education:

- NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF) - **Request assistance**
- ACLU of Texas **legal intake form**
- Transgender Law Center **Help Desk**
- Lambda Legal **Help Desk**

HIGHER-ED ADVOCACY ROAD MAP

You have been impacted by transphobia in higher ed. Now what?

SEEK SAFETY AND SECURITY FOR YOURSELF AND/OR THOSE IMPACTED

At colleges and universities, transphobic peers and decisionmakers are most successful in inflicting harm when they are allowed to single out supportive students, educators, and staff, even when they are delivering basic educational and truthful information. Remember there is strength in numbers. Seek out the support of loved ones, allies, and accomplices in your classroom, your department, and your school to troubleshoot how you can establish physical and emotional safety for yourself and/or those impacted. **When you have been able to establish safety and support, start a document with information about what you experienced.**

REVIEW YOUR RESOURCES

Usually the process of how to file a grievance or complaint can be found online and through the office of compliance. When filing, consider your resources, talk to your department, union, or organization you've found a home in. Reach out to legal organizations and TENT for any assistance.

ELEVATE YOUR CAUSE

When a hostile situation has impacted you, speak to allied supervisors and colleagues in your class, department, or school. Every campus is different, but educators and other colleagues frequently go out of their way to support their colleagues and protect their students.

EXPAND BEYOND CAMPUS

Identify safe places and resources beyond your school that are unapologetically pro-trans/queer. As you navigate through your issue, and troubleshoot a stressful situation, seek out sanctuaries like supportive community spaces, such as outspoken small businesses, public libraries with supportive staff, or friends' homes. Share these resources with others as a matter of community care!

STAY PROACTIVE: REACH OUT TO US

Even if you are dealing with a "worst case" scenario and you are in an unsupportive environment, you have allies in TENT and our legal partners. Reach out to us by sending us an email to support@transtexas.org.

REMEMBER: It is important to take steps as an educator or education administrator to center students and other vulnerable individuals. Prioritize alleviating pressure on them and yourself.

REFERENCED AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Not all of the resources included in this section have Spanish counterparts. We have indicated which resources are available in Spanish.

For Students (K-12)

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS AND ADVOCACY TOOLS

- Students Engaged in Advancing Texas (SEAT) **Resource Hub**
- SEAT's **Texas Student Power Map**
- ACLU of Texas **Students' Rights Hub**
- **Texas Trans Kids** and the **"Free to Be Me" Toolkit** (**Español**)

SB 12

- **SB 12 Know Your Rights** - ACLU of Texas
- **The SB 12 lawsuit** (GSA Network, et al. v. Morath, et al.) and more **here**
- **SB 12 Breakdown** - TENT
- **Social Transition Letter** to School Districts - TLC and ACLU of Texas

GSAS, SAGAS, AND STUDENT CLUBS

- **GSA Network** (school and community GSAs)
  - **Starting a GSA**
  - **Registering your GSA with GSAN**
  - **Starting a campaign**
  - **GSA Network Resource Library**
- **STAR Freedom School** (summits and toolkits)
- **GSAs UNITE Platform** - youth/student-led platform

SB 8

- **SB 8 Know Your Rights** - ACLU of Texas
- **SB 8 Breakdown** - TENT
  - SB 8 Breakdown (**Español**)

MENTAL HEALTH

- **Crisis Support Lines**
  - Crisis Support Lines (Español coming soon)
- See our **Mental Health Resources** public Google Drive folder
  - Most of these resources have Spanish and English versions.

For Families

DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES

- **Update** on where things stand with protections against Texas DFPS investigations of supportive families
  - DFPS Update (Español)
- **Know Your Rights Card** - for youth interacting with CPS
  - CPS Know Your Rights Card (Español coming soon)
- Making a **Family Safe Folder**
  - Making a Family Safe Folder (Español coming soon)

PFLAG

- **Become a member of PFLAG**
- **PFLAG Chapters Directory**
- Email **support@transtexas.org** for assistance in verifying whether a chapter is active

For Educators and School Employees (K-12)

- **SB 12 Know Your Rights** - A resource by the ACLU of Texas, TLC, and Texas AFT
- Unionize: **Join Texas AFT**

For Higher Education

- **Making an Adult Safe Folder**
- Carpetas Seguras (**Español**)
  - **HB 229 - Higher Education Framing**
  - HB 229 (**Español**)
- **American Association of University Professors (AAUP) FAQ for Campus Free Speech in Politically Charged Times**
- NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF) - **Request assistance** regarding discrimination on your campus

Digital and Physical Safety

- TENT's Digital and physical safety **guide**
  - Seguridad Digital (**Español**)

Legal Help Desks/Intake Forms

- ACLU of Texas **legal intake form**
- Transgender Law Center **Help Desk**
- Lambda Legal **Help Desk**
- NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF) **Assistance**

CONTACT US

support@transtexas.org

@transtexas

www.transtexas.org

TRANSGENDER EDUCATION NETWORK OF TEXAS