# Responding to Caregivers/Community Questions

The purpose of this document is to support educators with responding to caregivers.

| Possible Question: Why should my child learn about gender and sexuality identity at school? |
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| Possible Response: The learning we're talking about will happen through exposure to diversified gender and sexuality identity representation, not explicit instruction. Students are already learning about gender and sexuality identity in myriad ways. For example, when we read a story with mom and dad, a Prince kisses a Princess at the end of a fairy tale.<br><br>A School is where children are taught to respect one another and learn to work together regardless of their differences. Learning about--through exposure to diversified representation--gender diversity and sexuality identity diversity is part of that work. Our students are growing up in a world that is increasingly recognizing the diversity of gender and sexuality. Creating a more tolerant, inclusive, and accepting school environment teaches all children to recognize and resist stereotypes. We teach children to stand up for others, resist bullying, and work together. All students deserve to see themselves in books, including students who identify as LGBTQ+, come from LGBTQ+-headed families, and have family members who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. Inclusive books support a student's ability to empathize, connect, and collaborate with diverse peers and encourage respect for all. Anti-LGBTQ bias hurts all children, both those directly affected and those who learn in an atmosphere of fear and tension, afraid to explore their own lives because of worry about disapproval and rejection. LGBTQ+ inclusive books benefit all students by promoting acceptance and respect and teaching them more about the diverse people and families in the world. |

| Possible Question: Isn't my child too young to be learning about gender and sexuality identity? |
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| Possible Response: Children are already learning about it and mostly see "straight" and "cisgender" representations around them. Messages about gender are everywhere, and children receive clear messages about the "rules" for boys and girls, and the consequences for violating them. By learning about the diversity of gender, children have an opportunity to explore a greater range of interests, ideas, and activities. For all children, the pressure of "doing gender correctly" is significantly reduced, creating more space for them to discover new talents and interests. Students of all ages must be given the opportunity to learn that the words "gay," "lesbian," and "transgender" are adjectives that should be used with respect to describing people in their community, not words used in a negative way to hurt, insult, and degrade. Beginning these conversations in elementary school will help young people develop empathy for a diverse group of people and learn about identities that might relate to their families or even themselves. It is never too early for schools to set up a foundation of understanding and respect. |

| Possible Question: Ideas about gender diversity go against the values we are instilling in my child at home. Are you trying to teach my child to reject these values? |
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| Possible Answer: Absolutely not. Our children encounter people with different beliefs when they join any community. Teaching about LGBTQ+ is not about making students think a certain way; it is to show that there is no one “right” or “normal” way to be. Expanding our representation shows our LGBTQ+ community members that this is a place where they are welcome and included. While one aim for learning about diversity is to become more accepting of those around us, not everyone will be best friends. That does not mean that they can’t get along and learn together. The purpose of learning about gender and sexuality identity diversity is to demonstrate that children are unique and that there is no single way to be a boy, girl, or any other gender. If a child does not agree with or understand another student’s gender identity or expression or their sexuality identity, they do not have to change how they feel about it. However, they do not get to make fun of, harass, harm, or ignore the existence of other students whose gender identity or expression or sexuality identity they don’t understand or support. Gender and sexuality identity inclusive education is about teaching students to live and work with others. You do not need to fully understand another person’s experience to treat them appropriately. It comes down to the simple agreement that all children must be treated with kindness and respect. Teaching LGBTQ+ inclusive books acknowledges the reality that many students come from LGBTQ+-headed families, have family members that are part of the LGBTQ+ community, are being taught by LGBTQ+ educators, and are, increasingly, identifying as LGBTQ+ themselves, even in elementary school. |

| Possible Question: Can I keep my child home when students are learning about LGBTQ+ topics? |
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| Possible Answer: As part of MCPSs commitment to equity and our school's mission, we are working towards cultivating inclusive environments for all of our students and their families. Part of how we do this is through diversifying representation in the curriculum; expanding our representation shows our LGBTQ+ community members that this is a place where they are welcome and included. All students deserve to see themselves in their school and classroom, including students who identify as LGBTQ+, come from LGBTQ+-headed families, and have family members who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. While there are no planned explicit lessons related to gender and sexuality, students will see these identities embedded in our curriculum and learning environment. Explicit instruction involves teaching a specific concept or procedure in a highly structured and carefully sequenced manner where there is an opportunity to model, coach and apply the learning. The concepts or terms that relate to gender and sexual identity are not taught explicitly, but there may be a need to define words that are new and unfamiliar to students. This is not explicit instruction; for students for whom some of these identities are new, questions and conversations might organically happen. |

Inclusive curricula support students' ability to empathize, connect, and collaborate with diverse peers and encourage respect for all. No child who does not agree with or understand another student's gender, expression, or their sexual identity is asked to change how they feel about it. Parents always have the choice to keep their student(s) home while using these texts; however, it will not be an excused absence.

Possible Question: Are these books appropriate? What place do they have in the classroom?

Possible Answer: Our Board Policy states, "Instructional materials used in MCPS schools will reflect the diversity of the global community, the aspirations, issues, and achievements of women, persons with disabilities, persons from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, as well as persons of diverse gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation." Additionally, two of the goals of the MCPS guidelines are: "Reduce stigmatization and marginalization of transgender and gender nonconforming students and Foster social integration and cultural inclusiveness of transgender and gender nonconforming students." These books are a way for us to actualize the policy and gender identity guidelines.

These books have undergone a rigorous evaluation process conducted by a group of school-based and central office-based staff members, and are approved as instructional materials. All of the content within them is age and developmentally-appropriate. The texts are directly connected to language arts standards and CASEL competencies, used for social and emotional learning lessons.

Sources: Responding to Concerns: Teaching About Gender, Developing LGBTQ+ Inclusive Resources, Reading the Rainbow