

CHANGES TO GENDER DOCUMENTATION IN SCHOOLS

In the coming months, there will be changes to how we record gender in schools across Nova Scotia. These changes are the result of amendments to the Vital Statistics Act in the province. The following questions and answers will help explain what is changing, and how these changes will impact children/youth, families and schools.

What do we currently record in schools?

- Sex has historically been recorded during the school registration process in PowerSchool. Sex is typically assigned at birth and based on the appearance of one's body.
- The sex of a child/youth has been recorded based on what is indicated on their birth certificate or other legal documentation.

What is changing?

In Law:

- In 2019, Nova Scotians, through the Office of Vital Statistics, will be able to identify and/or change their gender marker to F (Female), M (Male), or X (non-binary, or another gender identity) on their birth certificate. This option is also available to all Canadians on their passport.

In PowerSchool:

- The term "sex," which refers to sex assigned at birth, will be changed to "gender" in PowerSchool and TIENET, which refers to one's gender identity. Gender identity is a person's internal sense of being female, male, both or neither. Gender identity refers to a person's internal experience and cannot be determined by others.
- Sex will no longer be recorded in PowerSchool; only gender identity will be documented.
- Where sex and gender identity are the same (cisgender), there is no need for change. Where sex and gender identity do not align (transgender, gender fluid, gender diverse, etc.), this change will allow for the identities of all children and youth to be equitably recognized and documented by schools.
- PowerSchool will be updated to include the gender marker X, in addition to F and M. Similar to the markers F, and M, which have female and male specific pronouns, in English, X will have gender neutral pronouns, such as "they, them, or their," which will be entered manually by teachers when preparing documents. In French, where gender neutral pronouns do not exist, teachers will refer to gender inclusive writing guidelines when preparing documents.
- Children and youth, and/or their parents/guardians, can request to have their identified gender changed in PowerSchool without having to legally change their gender with the Office of Vital Statistics. They may also choose to legally change the child or youth's gender through Vital Statistics and be issued a new birth certificate, in which case the same process will be followed.

What already exists?

- The Nova Scotia Human Rights Act was amended in 2012 to assert, that no person shall discriminate against an individual or class of individuals on account of gender identity or gender expression.
- In 2014, EECD released the [*Guidelines for Supporting Transgender and Gender-nonconforming Students*](#).
- In 2018 PowerSchool was modified so that the identified preferred first name of children and youth appeared on all school documents, and that their preferred pronouns would be honoured.

Why is this change important?

- Safe and inclusive learning environments are essential to children and youth's engagement and success in school. When they feel validated, affirmed, and secure, their ability to learn is significantly enhanced.
- Identifying one's gender is an individual choice and is deeply connected to one's identity and sense of belonging. Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) is working with all Regional Centres for Education (RCEs) and the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) to create culturally responsive schools where all children and youth can experience well-being and thrive academically.

Who can make the request to change gender in PowerSchool?

- Children and youth, and/or their parents/guardians can request, verbally or in writing, to have their identified gender changed in PowerSchool. This request can be made during the school registration process for the Pre-primary Program to grade 12, or at any time throughout the school year.
- Parental/guardian consent will be requested for children in the Pre-primary Program to grade 6. From grades 7 to 12, if the student has the capacity to consent, parental/guardian consent is not required.
- Where there is disagreement or concern between the family and the child/youth, schools are to work diligently to support and collaborate with families and are to document those attempts. However, where agreement cannot be reached, schools will make the decision that causes the least amount of harm to the child/youth and is in their best interest.

When will these changes happen?

- PowerSchool is currently being updated to accommodate the changes listed above. The anticipated date for this is March 2019.

Who can I talk to if I have any questions?

- If you have any questions, you are welcome to speak with your school Principal or the Race Relations, Cross Cultural Understanding and Human Rights (RCH) Coordinator at your Regional Centres for Education (RCE) or Coordinator of Diversity and Human Rights at Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP).