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## FROM WOMEN'S COLLEGES TO GIRLS' SCHOOLS: GENDER DIVERSITY ON SINGLE-SEX CAMPUSES

### What We Can Learn from the Experiences of Women's Colleges Around Gender Diversity:

- The wish 'to do the right thing' is an excellent foundation and motive but may not provide the answers to the more complex questions.
- There is no single, one-size-fits-all solution to how single-sex schools can address gender diversity.
- Each school should wrestle with the particularities of its own experience, including mission, values and priorities, history and culture.
- Education should precede policy-making. School-wide gender diversity training should precede policy implementation.
- Each school should consider the varying interests of its multiple stakeholders/constituents: parents, faculty, students, trustees, alumnae, prospective students and their families, community, affiliated institutions.
- Each school should consider whether it is wise to develop explicit policies in reference to transgender students, or whether it is best not to.
- Legal concerns -- which vary by locale -- are highly significant, as are others: pedagogy, messages around diversity, reputation, and public relations.
- There are three separate trans\* scenarios to consider: FTM students; MTF students; and non-binary/genderqueer-identifying students.

### Salient Differences Between Women's Colleges and Girls' Schools Which Affect Gender Diversity Issues:

- Age of the students
- School's accountability to parents
- Higher stakes for student's self-expression of gender nonconformity
- Prohibitions against sexual contact
- Application process differences

## **DISCUSSION NOTES:**

### **Age of the students:**

By age 18-22, individuals are capable of self-examination, abstract and original thought, and nuanced, critical thinking. They understand things like time, change, and consequences. This is why late adolescence is typically prime-time for identity experimentation and exploration.

In contrast, young children view the world in black and white, static terms, and view themselves at the center of the world around them. When a young child identifies as the opposite gender, it might be because they are nascent transsexuals – or it might be because they're only aware of two options, which is then reinforced by their cognitive skill level being black and white, dichotomous thinking. The child assigned female at birth who feels not quite like a girl will therefore say, I'm a boy, instead of what a 19 year old might say, "I'm genderqueer," or "I'm trans."

The cross-gender identifications of young children should be viewed within the context of both their cognitive/emotional capabilities, as well as the gender options they are presented with.

Students over 18 have full legal rights of self-determination, whereas parents retain those rights for younger children.

### **School's accountability to parents**

The relationship between the school and the parents of pre-college students involves greater parental involvement, input, and surveillance of the school. K-12 schools, particularly boarding programs, are expected to act *in loco parentis*.

For example, if parents object to their non-trans daughter sharing a bathroom, locker room, or dorm room with a trans girl, their input would have different consequences for the independent school than when parents of college students object.

### **Higher stakes for self-expression**

Free speech and self-expression through dress and behavior are hallmarks of college life and learning. In contrast, primary and secondary schools govern student behavior more intensively, often enforcing a gender binary-based definition of what it is to be a girl (e.g., a dress code that enforces traditional female gender roles). In order to express themselves in these environments, younger gender-nonconforming must inevitably make major statements about being different from others.

**Admission process differences:** Gateway considering expanding two options to more; TABS only has male/female; schools who don't use any common app can choose the number of gender options.