



Tabletop Session Summary

July 8, 2021

Challenging Assumptions: Teaching and Learning Outside of the Binary

Presenters: Michelle Nutter and Marianna Stepniak, [Center for Education Equity at MAEC \(Region I\)](#); Sam(ira) Obeid, [Community Tampa Bay](#)

This tabletop discussion provided strategies for creating safe and inclusive spaces.

Session Highlights

- » While assumptions are often made based on how people are viewed, they can be harmful if they are used to judge and if they affect behavior towards people.
- » Discomfort is not the same as safety and can sometimes be necessary to move through vital conversations. It is important to prioritize student safety over adult comfort.
- » Best practices in providing safe and respectful environments for students include building trust and rapport with students. Doing research to build underlying knowledge to engage and have informed conversations with students can be helpful.
- » Listening is another important practice. Approaching students with an open and welcoming mindset and asking questions can be valuable (e.g., what names and pronouns to use for a student).
- » Think of alternative ways to group students rather than in binary groups, where students may not be sure where they fit in to a group. Instead, for example, group students by birthdays in a particular month.
- » Program and school staff should also be sure to keep their eyes and ears open for interactions among students and staff that might have harmful or hurtful language. Having anonymous ways or different mechanisms to report concerns can be advantageous in ensuring the safety of students. It's also important to understand federal civil rights statutes and state laws for students.

Shared Resources

- » [Community Tampa Bay - ANYTOWN](#)
- » [Ensuring a Safe and Inclusive School Environment for LGBTQ Students](#)
- » [Helping Educators to Support LGBTQ Students](#)
- » [Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium](#)
- » [Supporting LGBTQ Students Faced with Harassment – Podcast](#)
- » [Thriving, Not Just Surviving: Centering the Needs of Transgender and Non-binary Students at School](#)
- » [Title IX Resources](#)



Questions and Answers on Challenging Assumptions: Teaching and Learning Outside of the Binary

Are community-based settings structured differently to allow more flexibility than a typical school setting?

There is more flexibility in the way that community-based programs are run. Community-based organizations have less of a hierarchical structure, and there is more flexibility in their curricula compared to traditional school settings. Summer programs may also be moving away from a more traditional way of teaching to a way of facilitating that allows ideas to be shared and not necessarily taught. When gauging progress, tension can be a sign of progression and pushback an indication that change is in effect.

