Musical Interlude ([00:15](#)):

[inaudible]

Tori ([00:17](#)):

Welcome to Gender School: Smash the System, an OutFront Minnesota podcast, where we have conversations about trans equity and gender inclusion throughout Minnesota school districts. We hope to explore more about which policies create more gender inclusive school environments, and we'll reflect on the data we've collected from trans non-binary and allied youth across Minnesota high schools. I'm this episode's host, Tori Westenberg. Hey everyone, thank you for listening today. We have a special guest Leah Jordan from St. Paul public schools here to talk about gender inclusion policies in Minnesota school districts, and how we as youth can create welcoming environments. They'll help us make some sense of the data we've collected through our high school surveys asking students how inclusive they feel their school district is. Thank you for coming and listening to this podcast. Um, Leah, would you like to introduce yourself?

Leah ([01:09](#)):

Yeah, of course my name's Leah Jordan. I use they them pronouns. Um, I do work for St. Paul public schools. I'm very fortunate to work for the office of equity in the Out For Equity program. Um, that for equity program has existed at St. Paul public schools since 1995. Um, but it's just making sure that the district finds ways that we can support our LGBTQ+ students and families.

Tori ([01:37](#)):

That is that's so great to hear. Um, and thank you for taking time out of your day to come and talk with us about gender inclusion. Would you mind sharing a bit more about your position and the kind of work that you usually do, especially with LGBTQ youth?

Leah ([01:53](#)):

Absolutely. Um, so one of the things I get to do that's super cool is I'm basically the district point person for all of our GSA advisors. So Saint Paul public schools is a huge district. We have a lot of different, uh, buildings and schools and most, not all, but most of our middle schools and high schools have a running and operating GSA. And so if the advisors in those specific buildings come up with any concerns, if they need additional support, they have someone in the district they can go to who they know will be in their corner. So sometimes it's an issue that comes up with a student where they're like, Hey, I have this kid that's going through this really rough time. I'm not super sure how to support them, this is kind of new to me. They can come to me, um, or my colleague Clark Hoelscher, and we can help make sure that the entire system is working to support that student rather than just that one adult in their building. So that's super cool. I still get to be connected with students in that way, cause I used to be a teacher and now this is what I get to do. And then the other part of my, my role with Saint Paul public schools is creating and facilitating professional development for teachers. So, I create a training or like a learning opportunity for the adults in the schools to learn more about how they can be affirming and inclusive of the LGBTQ+ youth in those spaces. Yeah. It's super cool. It's a really cool job. I'm not going to lie.

Tori ([03:30](#)):

That job position just seems like amazing and so beneficial for LGBTQ youth. So what an amazing position.

Leah ([03:36](#)):

Yeah, it's super cool. And with Saint Paul public schools, you know, the majority of our students are really BIPOC students. And so, um, I also do a little bit on the racial equity side with the office of equity because ultimately we feel it's really important that any queer support we give to our students is intersectional because our students don't look like me necessarily. They're not, majority of them are not white.

Tori ([04:04](#)):

And in order to have any kind of inclusion in a school, you need to be inclusive of all identities. So that's great that you kind of mix in those two, those two works together. Um, I, myself am very passionate about educational equity, especially for LGBTQ students. And so it's just, it's so cool to know that careers like that exist out there. Um, and that there were people out there helping to achieve that educational equity.

Leah ([04:28](#)):

Yeah.

Tori ([04:28](#)):

So as you already know myself, along with Bisandi and Kai, uh, we are currently research interns with OutFront Minnesota working on a gender inclusion policy project. In this project, our team reached out to students and faculty in four Minnesota districts, district 11 one nine six one five two and then six two five, um, which is Saint Paul public schools, and we asked them for their perspective on gender inclusion, through our surveys and interviews. I'm kind of wondering how much do you work specifically with gender inclusion in Saint Paul? Do you think gender inclusion in Saint Paul is like a big focus?

Leah ([05:05](#)):

I think those are both really good questions. I think the, like is gender inclusion, a big focus in Saint Paul, um, is a question that will probably vary a little bit based on who you ask?

Tori ([05:17](#)):

That's True!

Leah ([05:17](#)):

Yeah, when it's such a large district, there's so many different policies and initiatives and things that different buildings are focused on. We try to make sure that it is always at the forefront, especially like at the beginning of the year, any changes in semester, where like schedules may be shifting a little bit is usually when we see an increase in students wanting to make some sort of social transition at school. So we usually see quite a bit in the beginning of the year, quite a bit like around January when the, when the semester switches over, and then some at the end of the year, because then students can kind of like get started on it, as the school year ends and then kind of come back fully transitioned in this in the fall.

Leah ([06:07](#)):

Saint Paul is a little unique in that we have a full gender inclusion policy and procedures, and it's of course, very nuanced and complicated and, and all these things. And as you know, with any large

system, there's always roadblocks or things that get in the way or forms that should be simple, but ended up being painfully complicated. But we really try to operate under the baseline of, we will do what the student needs us to do. And we'll find a way to make that happen in a way that is safe for the student.

Tori ([06:47](#)):

I love that that Saint Paul public schools is so motivated and kind of committed to that genuine inclusion that like, if a student needs something, you have a position and people that will be there and be there to say, I can help you with that.

Leah ([07:01](#)):

Absolutely. Absolutely. And so once the, um, gender inclusion policy was created, which you think was in 2015, um, then there was training done for like all of the counselors so that the counselors knew how to support a student who wanted to socially transition or a student who identified outside of a gender binary and wanted to actively do so at school principals have gotten training on it. Some like whole building staff have gotten trainings, but not every building. We do every year run, um, safe space training for teachers. And, there's a little training for like explaining the gender inclusion policy to teachers. And then there's like a LGBTQ essentials class, which is like, literally like one-on-one for people who have a lot of questions,

Tori ([08:04](#)):

Questions. I wish my teachers had gotten any of that information. Um, like even just, um, identity, a queer identity identity One-oh-one. Like you said, like if my teachers knew what asexual meant, not in a science plant-based tone, it would blow my mind, um, and make the environment so much better. Um, when looking back on the data that we've collected for most surveys, um, from youth in the south St Paul area, out of the ninth to 12th graders, , students that we surveyed 90% of them said that they agreed on some level with the statement. I am satisfied with my school's current gender inclusion efforts, and that's pretty impressive that 90%, uh, pretty satisfied in south St. Paul public schools, um, it's kind of overwhelmingly positive for district six to five. Um, it sounds to me like something is definitely going right. Are you surprised at all by the statistic?

Leah ([09:01](#)):

Honestly, I really was. Um, I mean, I definitely think we're doing good work, and I think that we have a lot of, um, policies that are in place that support, um, our trans and non-binary and gender diverse students. Um, and we're really fortunate to be really supported by a school board that overwhelmingly, um, will approve those policies for us. Um, and a superintendent who has, has been supportive in his, um, career with us so far. So there's a lot going right. Um, and there's a lot that, um, you know, we have kind of this history with, out for equity starting in the mid nineties, and then the gender inclusion policy passing in 2015. Like we're not the only school district with a gender inclusion policy, but we were kind of on the forefront of it, uh, in Minnesota. And so, because we kind of have that established history, I think it allows us to be in a position where, um, it's a lot more public facing in terms of like, you know, a seventh grader knows this is a possibility because their friend's cousin, you know, transitions six years ago or something.

Leah ([10:19](#)):

So like so much gets spread that way. And then, you know, we, we stay in constant contact with our GSA advisors and our counselors, which help make sure that they are like immediately ready to support students. And because myself and my colleague Clark are readily available, like our position is to provide that district level support. I think it helps create something that's a lot more, um, cohesive for the student. I do think, you know, we have a lot of work to do, um, which is why I was a little surprised at how positive that response was.

Tori (10:59):

Yeah. It wasn't, um, we did not obviously get to survey all of the students, but we, we did our outreach as best as we could. And then with the responses that we got, um, it was 90% overwhelmingly positive, um, with the 90% being satisfied with my school's current gender inclusion efforts. Um, but still that's a pretty overwhelming response.

Leah (11:18):

It is so I'm glad, I'm glad we're doing something right. I'm excited that to keep redefining how we do something right. For students.

Tori (11:26):

Yeah. Um, one of my questions was actually like, what are your thoughts on ways that schools are succeeding right now? And it sounds kind of clear, like gender inclusion policies are, a big key, a reason that these schools are succeeding the way that they are. Um, could you kind of explain, like, what are some things that are covered in gender inclusion policies? Like what are the specific regulations that kind of make these school environments more inclusive?

Leah (11:52):

Oh for sure. So I think one of the reasons that gender inclusion policies are so, so important, um, is that a lot of school districts will just lean on like title nine and like the general anti-bullying policy as like a kind of a catch all like, oh, well, you know, like we can discipline someone for transphobic remarks because of the anti-bullying policy or whatever, but that doesn't really mean it happens because there's nothing explicitly stating it. And so it allows school districts, unfortunately, to be able to be like, well, that's not really something we deal with, you know, but if there is a specific gender inclusion policy, then you can't shy away from it because you literally have a policy saying you have to do something to support that student. But so our gender inclusion policy allows students to, um, change their name and their pronouns within the school without having to do so legally.

Leah (12:52):

So, it really allows students to, feel safe and affirmed in their school environment without being deadnamed, and without being mis-gendered. Um, so we, through the gender inclusion policy have established a way where we can, so like the student information management system, but like takes attendance and keeps all the student records and stuff is called Campus. And so we've set up a way like indirect, collaboration with the, like the campus, software, so that we could change students like nicknames and pronouns and make that what's publicly visible without the student having to go through some like government legal name change.

Tori (13:49):

Especially like everyday when you have to log on to school. And if you may have to see that, that dead name, um, that can cause dysphoria every single day that, I think schools don't realize how crucial it is just to be able to change your name in the system. For instance, at my school, if you will wanting to change your name in the school system, you need to bring in your parents if your under 18, I believe, from what I've seen. So that is not great for trans folks at all. And so district six two five does have a gender inclusion policy, which is very beneficial for trans students, and all students really. But some of the other districts that we surveyed did not have gender inclusion policies. Um, for instance, district 152 only the Morehead area, had 75% of students that we surveyed say that they disagreed on some level with the statement: I am satisfied with my school's current gender inclusion efforts. So kind of on the flip side, um, 75% of them are not at all happy with what their school is is doing in terms of gender inclusion. So Moorhead does not have a gender inclusion policy while south St. Paul public schools does. From what you've seen, do you think having a gender inclusion policy is what really makes that difference when it comes to either a positive or negative gender inclusion environment?

Leah (15:11):

I really think it does because I think ultimately it sends the message to the community at large, like not just individual buildings or individual teachers, but families and community and organizations that participate with the district that this is something that we deeply believe in. And I think once you kind of set up that environment and that like, that culture of "we recognize and honor, uh, gender diverse students, and we're committed to that, and we're going to like create an accountability system to hold ourselves to that." I think that sends a very clear message that allows students to kind of start to advocate for themselves because there's a clear path for them to advocate for themselves. And it's not, it takes away the unknown of like, if I want to socially transition at school, what does that look like? How does that happen? Will they let me, will I be supported? Who do I talk to? Is someone going to be in my corner? Like it, it helps alleviate some of that stress. I do think we could be better about how we, how we get students and families and staff to understand and utilize the gender inclusion policy. But I think it sends a clear message of support.

Tori (16:34):

And you talked about accountability, which I feel like is so important. Um, we also surveyed staff, um, from a lot of the data that we collected. Um, a good percentage of them is specifically from my own high school, said that they feel like they were very gender, gender inclusive towards those students, that they feel like they create this, overwhelmingly positive gender inclusive environment. And then we, when we continue to look at those same districts where the students are saying, like 75% of them don't feel satisfied with what their school is doing in terms of gender inclusion. I think sometimes administration and staff don't hold themselves accountable. And they might say things like, there's no hate tolerated in my classroom. But they don't maybe teach that in the curriculum. Maybe they don't highlight, um, trans voices in their curriculum. And when you don't teach anything, and you don't give anything for trans students, it's kind of a hate and violence in itself.

Leah (17:33):

I think that's one of the biggest issues we see, and that disconnect is so common between staff being like, yeah, no, I'm super inclusive. And students being like mmm, not so much. I really do think it comes down to exactly what you said of like, you know, the teachers are like, yeah, no, of course I support my trans students. Of course I support students. Like obviously, um, and, and I think they really like feel that and believe that, and like live by that, but then it's like, okay, but how do you do that? And then all of a sudden it's like, uh, oh, I don't know. And they're like, I mean, I would stop a student if they like said

something transphobic and it's like, okay. So do you talk about transness in your class? Do you like read a book with a trans character? Do you read a math problem with gender neutral pronouns? And then all of a sudden it's like, wait, what I'm supposed to do? All of that. It's like visibility matters. Representation is important.

Tori (18:25):

It's so important. I mean, my, my teachers will send out a survey asking, what are, what are the pronouns you use? And can I use these with your parents? And if I ever see that it's like, whoa, this is amazing. And it's like, this is kind of the bare minimum for, for knowing how to address your students correctly and not mis-gendering them. But whenever I see that, I'm like, wow, it was so refreshing.

Leah (18:46):

Yeah. Yeah. Again, and it's that, it's that message, right? It's that like, communicating that, like, Hey, I'll be in your corner. I like am at least aware that this is a thing that I should be honoring.

Tori (18:58):

Yeah. Um, what would you say that schools need to work on oil, prioritize most in order to become increasingly gender inclusive and welcoming?

Leah (19:08):

Hmm. Great question. I'm going to cheat a little bit. I'm going to say two things. One, I think like it's what you said about like baseline, right? Like baseline is we need to have facilities. Our students feel comfortable using, um, because I don't care how many rainbows you stick up. It doesn't matter if the kid can't go pee comfortably. So I think baseline basic human, right? Give them facilities that they can use comfortably that are not in the far corner of the building. Um, and then the other one is I think, um, ha that shift of mindset from like not causing harm is not the same as honoring and affirming. And it's great that you don't cause harm. I'm so glad that doesn't mean that you're inclusive and creating a safe environment that is, um, really allowing your student to have the best educational experience that they should have that is there.

Leah (20:19):

Right. Um, and so I think it's that mindset of, um, we're going to create a culture in which this is not only named and recognized and like you're gendered correctly, but also it's celebrated and seen as an asset and like a perspective that can help cis and straight students grow. I think that really, we need to shift the narrative around, um, like difference to, um, like an asset mindset of like, these are students who have done some deep self reflection and have like lived through some really traumatic self growth in order to be able to say, Hey, this is who I am and whatever refreshing perspective to have and how beneficial for their peers to be able to interact with that perspective in a way that's honoring, um, it's for the benefit of all students.

Tori (21:20):

I think kids also need to know about, um, like trans heros that are alive today and LGBTQ people that they can look to, you know, as their politicians, their leaders right now in society. And a lot of times, all we see is a paragraph in a history book about Stonewall and they call it representation. And that's all I really got from school.

Leah ():

And God forbid, we admit that Stonewall was, uh, a riot that was started by black trans women. It's like a Stonewall happened, gays got some rights, we'll be done.

Tori ():

I don't even think the word black trans women was in my textbook. So they were like moving on, it's actually a little blip. Oh man, I'm kind of going back to our data. This might also surprise you in district 625, 100% of students surveyed expressed that they felt comfortable expressing their gender identity at school. So when we asked LGBTQ students if they felt represented, and this this is a different question, we asked LGBTQ students, if they felt represented at their school, with having enough safe spaces available, having a GSA, and curriculum an overwhelming 90% said, yes. Um, so it's, this is just going back to what we talked about before, but representation matters clearly these people, um, that we, the youth that we surveyed feel that they're being represented in some way, shape or form.

Leah ():

That's awesome. I love that so much. I'm really, um, surprised by the represented, um, response because of what we just talked about with curriculum and representation. But we do, you know, encourage our advisors to make sure that the GSA is a really visible and present part of the school community. And, and for the most part, I think that's pretty true across our buildings. So that's, that's great to hear. I think gender inclusion policies may affect, things kids don't even know about such as the ability to have a safe space, such as a GSA or gender and sexuality club of some sort, um, some schools aren't even allowed to have them. We talk with some students at Catholic schools that they, they are not in favor of having, um, gender and sexuality alliance clubs or safe spaces like that. Um, and having to new inclusion policies may promote, um, just in the chain of effects that that happens. So we can clearly see the gender policies in all forms kind of improve students' ability to feel comfortable in being themselves.

Leah ():

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. And like, just an example of that, our gender inclusion policy and like the protections that exist allow us to go to teachers and say, Hey, you want to read, "I am Jazz" or "Two Makes Tango" or "Kuleana is a Mermaid" or whatever in your like, preschool class. Well, guess what, you can do that. And if you get like angry parent emails or phone calls, you just say, you know what, this is a school policy. I'm just following the policy. If you're concerned about the policy, you can talk to the school board. And it, it takes the onus off of the teacher to like, handle that like community outrage that that can happen. Um, and it really allows the teachers to kind of be like, oh, okay, look, if I have an answer to that, then yeah. I'll read this book. Um, so it, it is really cool to see ways that it kind of like trickles down in and surprising moments.

Tori ():

Yeah. I really like that gender inclusion policies take the weight off the shoulders of the teachers. Um, some teachers at my, at my school, Eagan high school, um, had expressed, like they don't, maybe they don't want to advocate for something because there's not a policy and they don't want to be what kind of looked down on by other staff members. Um, yeah. And anything like that. Um, I was kind of wondering how do you think it's possible for us as LGBTQ youth to take steps to help schools implement gender inclusion policies?

Leah ([25:23](#)):

Yes. I love this question. Great question. So before I worked for St. Paul public schools, I was a teacher and a GSA advisor, uh, in a different area, high school. And when I took over the GSA, I just sat down with the students and I was like, listen, what are we doing well, what are we messing up on? Because we're not great. Like I know we're not great. So like, what do you need? And with the student, like the students really just like listed things out for me. And I took their list of things that they felt like they really needed. And I was impressed with the students, um, and how much they prioritize things. Like I just kinda sat back and they made a list and they had this whole discussion around like, well, but like, that's getting really nitpicky, and we really need like these three main things before we can like get to the small stuff or whatever. And so I took the list to the principal and I was like, this is what the students need. Um, and like, I think it, you know, it would have been even more powerful if the students had taken the list to the principal, but, um, at that point they didn't feel comfortable. So they were like, you're doing it. And the principal was like, oh gosh, yeah, I didn't, you know, like I want to support them. I love that they came up with this list. Let's, let's figure out how to do this. And so we made a district level committee. I did a training per the whole district staff around gender inclusion, things in classrooms, like simply putting your pronouns on your syllabus or surveying students for name and pronouns and how to have that conversation in a way that feels safe for the student and things like that.

Leah ([26:58](#)):

So students hold so much more power than they think they do. If they can get a staff member who will like egg them on a little bit. I think we all know examples of times students were really fired up and were advocating for something. And then an adult was like, no, we can't do that. And like, kind of squelched it. So I think it's important to have a representative that you feel safe with that, you know, will advocate for you, but students can really bring demands to schools. And honestly, if you bring a demand to the principal and the principal doesn't do anything, bring the demand up,

Tori ([27:37](#)):

Go one step higher.

Leah ([27:38](#)):

Exactly. And just be annoying.

Tori ([27:43](#)):

And I like what you said about making like that whole plan and presenting it to them when you kind of show principals or committees or, um, school boards that you have thought this out, especially if you come with a group and you present them a plan and they might say, well, well, here's why we can't do it. And then you follow back with, I already thought of that and I have a step-by-step plan. Um, when you kind of take that responsibility off of their shoulders and you, you do some of that planning work, um, they might be more impressed and they might be like, oh, this is less work for me. Maybe I'll maybe I'll look into this.

Tori ([28:16](#)):

Yeah, absolutely.

Leah ([28:17](#)):

A couple of years ago, um, a Black Lives Matter, student chapter at Roseville, public high school, organized a list of educational demands and then organized and planned a lockout. And they walked from the high school to the Minnesota department of education and sat in the lobby of the Minnesota department of education and read their list of demands for their education. Um, that's so powerful. Yeah. And I can honestly say it changed the way staff development, like equity staff development happened at Roosevelt high school, um, because that list that the student made, um, became something that showed up again and again, in professional development trainings with staff, with teachers. So get annoying, get demanding.

Tori ([29:10](#)):

Getting groups together, I think is also just super powerful, whether you can find peers that that feel the same way you do, finding that group of teachers, like you said, that will back you up. That's really empowering, I think. And anything you annoying enough about for any period of time, will get some kind of attention from some groups. So, um, and then finally, for teachers listening, possibly our GSA advisors, listening, maybe even, um, out school boards listening, what are the ways that they can be more inclusive and take those steps if they were really trying to create that positive and gender inclusive environment? What, what can they do?

Leah ([29:52](#)):

That's a great question. I really think adults in school buildings need to have really honest conversations with themselves, and be reflective on why do they think that they're inclusive of LGBTQ plus students? What do they know about it? Where are the possible gaps in their understanding of this population of students? And what are they going to do about it? Like, um, Robin, de Angelo is, someone who educates a lot around racial equity and whenever someone asks her like, okay, I get it, racism is a problem but what would we do about it? Her response is, what have you done about it? It's 2021, the internet exists. What have you already done to figure out what to do about it? And, you know, there's always like the not much. So I, I kind of turn that back to teachers a little bit. Like, you know, it's one thing to be like, I love all my students. I don't care like what their identity is in terms of like, it doesn't bother me, but like, okay. So what have you done to educate yourself and to communicate in a very public and clear way to all of your students that you support the queer kids n your educational space.

Tori ([31:13](#)):

Right? It's not just about creating that hate. It's about uplifting those voices so that they can move forward in their career and feel like they matter and that they are represented and they have a place going forward. Well, we are all really passionate about being gender inclusive, um, um, especially for trans and non-binary students in schools who are more often than not, not represented very well or prioritized, especially if the school or district does not have a gender inclusion policy. But we all definitely need to take action to make an education systems, more gender inclusive. We need to hold ourselves accountable and we need to prioritize uplifting queer voices. I was wondering Bisandi and Kai do have anything you want to add or ask or, um, contribute to talking about gender inclusion right now with Leah?

Bisandi ([32:01](#)):

I just want to say that just like, as someone that kind of like stayed back and just listened to this, this was so awesome to hear. And Tori, you did great, Leah, It was so awesome to hear everything that you have to say. And it's just so nice to hear that we have like district leaders kind of backing us up backing trans

youth up and making sure that they're properly represented and being, you know, treated fairly in schools. And I think this was a conversation that a lot of districts and, um, a lot of teachers and staff members and even our youth could learn from.

Leah (32:35):
Thanks Bisandi.

Kai (32:37):
Yeah I agree with Bisandi, it was really amazing to listen to what Leah had to say. And, um, I think Tara, you asked some really good questions and, um, yeah, it was really exciting to hear this.

Tori (32:51):
I feel very uplifted as a first-time podcast host. So thank you for boosting my ego a little bit. This is really cool. Thank you so much for your perspective on all of this Leah, it was so cool to hear about your like dream position for LGBTQ youth aspiring to create this kind of educational equity change in, in Minnesota. So thank you so much for everything you've contributed, everything that you talked about, and we've got a ton more to think about, and I think this conversation will be super helpful for a ton of people.

Leah (33:24):
Thank you for having me.

Tori (33:26):
Awesome. Thank you so much for listening everyone. Alright Wow. It was so good to have Leah on the podcast. It was so great hearing what they had to say, especially coming from someone with all of that experience in gender inclusion policies in schools, um, which directly ties to the work we've been doing with LGBTQ youth in schools. So super cool to hear their perspective. I'm kind of wondering from you all, did you kind of agree with what Leah talked about?

Kai (33:53):
Yeah, I agreed with what they said and yeah, I think that it is really important to have a gender inclusion policy because without it, you know, you could say that you are being gender inclusive though, but you have nothing to hold. You have nothing to hold you accountable to that inclusivity and with a gender inclusion policy, it's something that like, you know, it holds you accountable for it and make sure that you're being inclusive because it's listed. It's like, this is what, this is what we are going to do. This is what we stand by instead of just, you know, like, oh yeah, we're inclusive, but you know, you actually have something that's like, this is what we're doing.

Bisandi (34:29):
Yeah, I agree. Um, I think we definitely see that in our data to south St Paul, the St. Paul district was just like miles ahead in terms of like student satisfaction with like the current gender inclusion efforts. And Tori talks about this in their interview. But, um, we just see like, the data is overwhelmingly positive in that district. And, you know, I think going back to like what Kai said, it just holds the school district accountable and it allows students, students to feel like comfortable kind of coming into their own because, you know, there's, there's something there to protect them. There's not that fear of the

unknown of like, what's going to happen if I want to transition in my school. I think a gender inclusion policy kind of eradicates that.

Tori (35:22):

Yeah, for sure. Like, I'd imagine trans and non-binary students that want to get something specifically out of the administration, whether it would be a name change or, um, whatever they need from administration to stop transphobia, whether they want to dress a certain way, um, they can go to administration and they can pull up their gender inclusion policy and they can specifically point to it where it says, you need to allow me to do this in order to be a gender inclusive school district.

Tori (35:49):

Like you are required by law to let me express myself and my identity. Then I think schools will become a lot willingly inclusive, because there'll be like, okay, we literally have to, or we'll have a lawsuit. Um, and then Bisandi, you also talked about our data that reflects exactly what Leah was talking about as well. If we look at district 625 or south St. Paul public schools, um, we remember that 90% of the students we surveyed said that they agree that the school's gender inclusion efforts, um, 90% of the students we surveyed said that they were satisfied with their school's current gender inclusion efforts. So all the way up to 90% of them, I was saying that like, I'm pretty satisfied. I'm happy with the way that our school is showing gender inclusivity. And then when we look at districts like district 196, that does not have a gender inclusion policy, 76% of them said that they are not satisfied with those school's current gender inclusion efforts.

Tori (36:48):

Or if we look at district 152, the Morehead district that also does not have a gender inclusion policy, 75% of them said that they are not satisfied with their school's current gender inclusion efforts. Um, and so south Saint Paul public schools does have a gender inclusion effort. And I think that makes that huge difference with how the school environment is being gender inclusive. Students see that they recognize that, whether they're paying attention or not. Um, you can definitely tell with how gender inclusive a school is based on their gender inclusion policies. Does your school have a gender inclusion policy, Kai?

Kai (37:27):

No, it does not. Um, I feel like a gender inclusion policy would definitely help my school feel safer and would definitely help my experience at school because having things like gender neutral bathrooms and having teachers who can, you know, or having staff be able to change your name in the system and your pronouns or whatever, I feel like that definitely would make, my experience at school a lot better. And I feel like, um, it would definitely help me feel safer at school.

Tori (38:00):

That is the district showing students that they care enough not to retraumatize them, um, and that by letting students change their name and dress, how they like and use the restroom they want to, they're telling students that we accept your identity. It's cool to be you. We care about you and all the school is not tailored just for cisgender people. Um, that is something that they are showing these students basically that trans students matter is when you have all of those things and that they're not bottom of the barrel last thought. Um, I was wondering, what do we feel youth could be doing to promote gender equality in those schools? Do we agree with what Leah said? Do we have any other ideas?

Kai ([38:43](#)):

I definitely agree with what Leah said, and I think it's really important to, you know, find your school's GSA, become part of your school's GSA. And if you already are, you know, talk to the people who are in your GSA, if you have an adult GSA leader, talk to them, if you have any teachers that you know are supportive, get them on your side. And if you want gender inclusion, if you have a group that that you have behind you and stuff, and if you have friends that are allies, you know, anyone who is allies, get them on your side. And the more people you have, the easier it'll be, because it will be harder to not pay attention to you, the more people you have. So I think that getting a lot of people on your side and then also emailing, talking to people, I think that's really important to just get your point across and maybe show them our podcast, you know, show them outour podcast.

Tori ([39:35](#)):

I love that plug!

Tori ([39:35](#)):

Exactly. Get them to listen to this! Here we are, As LGBTQ youth activists telling you, you need to step up, you need to create that action. You need to every day, hold yourself accountable for making your spaces more gender inclusive.

Bisandi ([39:50](#)):

Yes. Get as much support as you can behind you. Personal experiences really hit home. I think it like it like strikes a chord in some people that allows them to relate and allows them to empathize maybe. Um, so that's actually a really good point, but just get support and just talk to your administration, email them, go to their office, set a list of demands of what you want and why you want them and why they're necessary.

Tori ([40:23](#)):

I mean, you're only in high school for four years, so it's not forever. If they, if your principal is annoyed at you, whatever. And also don't be afraid to get your parents involved, principals and administration.

Tori ([40:34](#)):

If they're not listening to you, they will listen to you parents because they are paying the taxes on the school. So, they will listen to the parents. If you have parents send the email, they will email you back. Um, and then lastly, I just want to lead off this quote, that a freshmen gave us in district one 96. Um, you know, so they, when asked the question, if you could do anything to change or make your school more gender inclusive, what would you improve or change? And the freshmen from district 196 responded. Well, when you mentioned that we don't have a gender inclusion policy, I think that's a really good idea. And I think it's pretty basic stuff that we should have. I was a little bit surprised when you said that we didn't have one. I mean, that pretty much sums it up.

Tori ([41:17](#)):

It seems pretty simple. This person is surprised that we don't even have one, it's time for district 196 and all schools in Minnesota to step up with getting a gender inclusion policy. That's going to do it for today's episode. You can find out more about Leah's work www.spps.org/genderinclusion, and more about what OutFront Minnesota does@outfrontmn.org. You can find us on social media at, at Outfront

MN and at Outfront youth, you can support our work by showing this podcast with your friends, family, classmates, teachers, and more as well as showing support by signing up for the Outfront Minnesota email newsletter on our website. This podcast is written, edited and directed by myself, Tori Westenberg, as well as my fellow team members, Kai and Bisandi. Our ogo was designed by myself, Tori, and outjingle was written and performed by Kai. We'll be back soon with more thoughts on gender inclusion and trans equity in Minnesota school districts. Thanks so much for listening. See you in the next episode.

Tori ([42:15](#)):

[inaudible].