Children's Community School
# Gender Inclusion Policy
Updated October 2018

All children, families, and staff at CCS have the right to feel seen, welcomed, valued, and understood at our school. The purpose of this document is to describe the policies and practices we use to help all children build positive <u>gender identities</u>, and to ensure safety, equity, and justice in the context of <u>gender</u>, especially knowing that our community includes <u>LGBTQIA</u>+ children and adults. In creating this document, we are guided by our mission statement's call to create "a learning community that honors and empowers children to engage their whole selves in education"—a community that is caring and welcoming to all, and that values identity and emotional development as crucial to the life of every child and every adult.

*Note: Items underlined in this document can be found in the glossary at the end.*

Our practices and policies are informed by some things that we know to be true about humans, about children, and about education:
- Each individual is the best judge of who they are and how they feel. It is crucial to honor and respect what each child and each adult says about who they are.
- Early childhood educators should always be guided by children's joy, excitement, and curiosity.
- Children's identities are constantly developing. Exploring various aspects of identity, including gender, is a normal part of human development. Responses to children's declarations of identities must be infused with respect, attention, and kindness. Children's identities develop best in environments free from shame; all people are harmed by being made to feel shame for who they are (see "Gender Shaming," below).
- Children learn best when there is open communication and ongoing dialogue between all caregivers.
- Creating a welcoming environment for people of any <u>gender</u> is a matter of building both attitudes (for instance, "I like being around all kinds of people") and skills (for instance, "I know how to use <u>pronouns</u> for non-binary people"). These attitudes and skills are important for both children and adults.
- <u>Sex</u>, <u>gender identity</u>, <u>gender expression</u>, and <u>sexual orientation</u> are independent aspects of a person's identity, though our culture does not always recognize or support those distinctions. The dominant culture in the United States culture privileges <u>cisgender</u> boys and men, heterosexuals, and those whose gender expression falls within certain cultural norms; an inclusive community takes particular care to support people with identities not on that list.

Our practices are growing and developing. Listed here are some existing school-wide practices. Within these, individual teachers, teaching teams, and other staff members continue to develop their own new practices.

- Classroom Practices
  - We discuss gender, gender identity, and gender expression with children in developmentally appropriate ways and using developmentally appropriate language. When appropriate and applicable, we discuss gender in the context of issues of justice (for instance, fairness, inclusion, etc.). Our understanding of developmentally appropriate approaches to discussing gender is informed by ongoing professional development, conversations among staff, experience with young children, and reading of applicable research.
  - We refer to children by the name, gender, and pronouns that they wish to be called, and teach other children to do the same.
  - We intentionally and frequently expose children to a wide variety of models of gender identity and expression (for instance, by including puppets who use they/them pronouns in our puppet shows, or by reading stories about people whose gender expressions do not match cultural norms). We do this not because we are promoting particular identities, but because increased representation of marginalized identities is important to the inclusion of all identities. We actively communicate to children that genders can be expressed in many different ways, and that the most important thing is for each person to be who they are, and to feel good about who they are.
  - We support children in building skills of using appropriate pronouns for all gender identities.
  - We include gender education both in our planned curriculum (e.g., circle time discussions) and in our lived curriculum (e.g., our everyday interactions with children).
  - We use language that doesn't assume the gender of people we don't know, and does not make gender an unnecessary focus (for instance, we might say "Good morning friends" instead of "Good morning boys and girls," or "Look at that worker" instead of "Look at that man working").
  - When reading books with children we may change characters' pronouns in order to increase representation of different genders and to fight gender stereotypes. When books depict harmful, exclusive, or stereotypical ideas about gender, we discuss this with children in developmentally appropriate ways.
- Institutional Practices
  - We refer to adults by the name, gender, and pronouns that they wish to be called, and expect and support other adults to do the same.
  - We work to proactively create spaces where naming gender and pronouns is the norm (e.g., identifying pronouns during introductions), and to not make this the responsibility of trans and non-binary people.
  - We support adults—both staff and families—in learning about gender and about ways to be supportive of people of all genders (e.g., professional development for staff on gender-inclusive curriculum; education for families on using appropriate pronouns for all gender identities; etc.).
  - We discuss our gender-related classroom practices on school tours, during New Family Orientation, and in other public and semi-public forums.
  - We include material about gender in our "social justice tips-of-the-week."

- ○ Teachers and other staff support families whose children are exploring gender identity by communicating clearly and consistently, by sharing knowledge and experience, by offering resources as applicable, and so on.

*A note on gender shaming*

As mentioned above, shame is harmful to all children. In some cases shaming can be overt—name calling or derogatory remarks, for example. In other cases, shaming can be subtle—the person doing it may not be aware they are doing it, and may even intend the opposite. Any time someone is told, directly or indirectly, that something is wrong with their gender identity or gender expression, they are being gender shamed. Examples of subtle gender-related shaming include criticizing or making assumptions about a child's choice of toys, clothes, or colors ("Wouldn't you rather have a pink one?"), commenting on a child's appearance in reference to gendered assumptions ("Eyelashes that long should be on a girl!"), and criticizing non-stereotypical behaviors or expressions ("Be a big boy, don't cry").

Glossary (Adapted in part from *Welcoming Schools*)
- Cisgender (or Cis)—When your gender identity is the same as what was assigned to you when you were born.
- Gender Binary—An approach to gender as two distinct and opposite groups: girl and boy. This idea excludes all the ways we can have a gender identity and express our gender.
- Gender Expression—How you show your gender to other people with things like your clothing, your hair, how you act, and so on.
- Gender Identity—How you feel about who you are; your internal sense of being a girl, boy, both, neither, or something else.
- LGBTQIA+—An acronym for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, and asexual." The plus indicates that there are important identities not contained in that list.
- Marginalized Identities—Identities that are historically or culturally given less power, respect, and/or visibility.
- Non-Binary—People who do not feel like the words "girl" or "boy" fit. They may feel like both, or neither, or another way.
- Pronouns—The words you use to refer to someone when you're talking about them to someone else. The most common are she/her, he/him, and they/them; others include ze/zir, xe/xem, and ze/hir.
- Sex—A label based on genitals and chromosomes; usually male, female, or intersex.
- Sex Assigned at Birth—Usually when a baby is born, a doctor or midwife looks at the baby's body and declares their sex.
- Sexual Orientation—Who you love or are attracted to. Typically young children are not described in terms of sexual orientation, but young children may know about orientation in regard to adults in their lives.
- They/Them—Pronouns that some people choose when they don't feel "she" or "he" fit.
- Transgender (or Trans)—When your gender identity is different than what was assigned to you when you were born.

Some links and resources
- "Children and gender identity: Supporting your child" (The Mayo Clinic, 2017). https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/childrens-health/in-depth/children-and-gender-identity/art-20266811
- "Gender Identity 101: The Definitive Guide To Discussing Gender"—A helpful and detailed article for adults. https://thebodyisnotanapology.com/magazine/gender-identity-101-the-definitive-guide-to-discussing-gender-in-the-21st-centu/
- The School District of Philadelphia policy on "Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Students" (2016). https://www.philasd.org/src/wp-content/uploads/sites/80/2017/06/252.pdf
- Queer Kid Stuff—A youtube channel with child-friendly discussions of gender and other topics. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCecsVoeJcsXbAra7Sl4mOPw
- Book: Who Are You? The Kids' Guide to Gender Identity (Pessin-Whedbee, 2016)—A great book to read with children. https://www.amazon.com/Who-Are-You-Gender-Identity/dp/1785927280
- "Gender Identity and Expression in the Early Childhood Classroom" (Solomon, 2016)—An example of teacher research on gender in a progressive, emergent-curriculum-based program. https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/jul2016/gender-identity
- "Simple Ways to Teach Gender Diversity to Young Children" (Gienapp, 2017)—Some concrete actions caregivers can take to help young children build inclusive mindsets.

As our practices continue to develop, we expect to consider questions including the following:
- What kinds of workshops and other education can we/should we offer to enrolled families and the broader community?
- How should these ideas be expressed in our various writings? For instance, our website, our flyers, our welcome letters to new families, etc.
- How do we ensure, on an ongoing basis, that we are appropriately balancing child-led versus teacher-led curriculum? How do we ensure that inquiry is at the core of our gender education?