

Transgender school policy leaves town terrified



Vandalism. Black armbands. A “hit list.” Death threats. Bullying. Parents afraid of losing their jobs. Girls leaving campus just to go to the bathroom. Students telling law enforcement they’re scared to go to school, afraid the high school in Fairfield, Iowa, may soon erupt in violence.

The situation in Fairfield is a lot worse than the media has reported, in large part, because parents and students are afraid to tell the story – or at least, afraid no one will tell their story fairly.

Fairfield Community Schools Superintendent Dr. Laurie Noll told KTV0-TV the majority of students are accepting of new policies put into place at the end of the last school year in compliance with a “Dear Colleague Letter” issued in May by the Obama administration, which dictates schools allow students who “identify” as transgender to use the bathroom, locker room, sports team, even overnight hotel room of the opposite sex.

Noll told KTV0 that outside of a vandalism incident, there was no verifiable misconduct happening at the school. End of story.

Only it isn't. Not even close.

The Des Moines Register then [blew off the situation](#) in Fairfield in yet another glowing piece about transgenderism in Iowa.

But the students of Fairfield High tell a different tale. In private, to parents or youth pastors, students are reporting shocking stories:

- Within 24 hours of the Obama administration's Dear Colleague Letter, a Fairfield girl "identifying" as a boy left on a school music trip to St. Louis and, in accordance with the new guidelines, bunked in the boys' hotel room for the trip. After she returned, her car was vandalized.
- Shortly thereafter, two female students were in the girls' locker room changing clothes when male students walked in, boasting, "This is how it is now. We're going to do what we want."
- A boy reported using the urinal in the men's room, when a biological female entered, stood next to him, pulled down her pants, and used the adjacent urinal.
- LGBTQ students began passing out black armbands to support the mandate and the girl whose car was vandalized. Those who chose not to wear them were shunned and taunted as "haters," "bigots," and "rednecks."
- A girl posted a "hit list" on the Internet, listing Fairfield students she deemed as "homophobes" who needed to be "hit."
- Many youth uncomfortable with bathrooms being a political "war zone" and opposite biological parts in their bathrooms tried to hold their restroom needs until they could get off campus. Hy-Vee employees reported that many high school youth came there at lunch or immediately after school and rushed to the store's bathroom.

- While pro-LGBTQ students wore color-coded T-shirts indicating their support for the bathroom policy, students wearing Christian-themed T-shirts, including one that read, “Love the person, hate the sin. Jesus loves you,” were told to change out of them. When a mother (who asked TFL not to be identified) confronted the school about her son’s legal rights and asked why her child was forced to change his Christian-themed shirt, she said, the principal told her that her son “needed to learn to be tolerant.”

Dr. Chris Meador, a local chiropractor, father of two Fairfield Junior High students, and chairman of the Fairfield concerned parents and pastors group Citizens United for Students’ Rights and Liberties, told TFL these are only the stories that have been “verified,” but there may be more.

“Lots of people say [about these new policies] that you don’t have to worry about transgender kids abusing them,” Meador said, “but this policy opens the doors to so many different things that could happen, and these are just some of them.”

Why the fear?

It’s clear that Fairfield’s transgender policy, which extends to the district’s middle school and three elementary schools as well, endangers the safety and privacy of schoolchildren. Girls hesitant to use the restroom or change in the locker room in front of biological males is understandable. Boys uncomfortable with dropping their drawers while a girl is using the adjacent urinal makes sense.

But in Fairfield, the fear runs much deeper.

Simon Spalla, a junior at Fairfield High when the new policies were put into place, told TFL the policy created an instant divide in the school, where the pressure to support the LGBTQ cause became a hotbed for bullying.

"The policy was changed on Friday, and by school [the following] Tuesday, if you didn't have one of the black armbands on supporting the gay/lesbian side, you were harassed," Spalla told TFL. "I was called a 'devil,' 'bigot,' and 'homophobe,' because I wore an armband of the other side, red and white for keeping the bathrooms the same. But I know people who wore no armbands, just trying to keep out of it, were harassed, too."

"On the Internet, a girl made a 'hit list,'" Spalla continued, "saying, 'Here are some people on my hit list who are homophobes.' There were kids who saw it and saw their names, asking, 'What are they going to do to me?'"

"I fear for these kids," said a law enforcement officer who spoke to TFL on the condition of anonymity, concerned his job could be jeopardized for speaking out. "I've talked to these kids, and they said there was never a problem until Obama sent that letter out and the superintendent made it policy. The next day, there was a big conflict. There was a lot of bullying going on, both sides."

"I was approached by a Fairfield student who is scared there will be shooting at school," the officer said. "But he doesn't want to tell his parents, because, he said, 'I don't know where my parents stand [on the bathroom debate].'"

The officer recalled he also had a girl approach him and say, "One thing that scares me is with today's technology, somebody could take a picture of me and send it on web, and it would ruin me mentally for the rest of my life."

"I didn't know how bad it was until they came to me," the officer explained. "Rumors get started, people talk, but when you've got young kids going up to law enforcement officers saying they're scared to go to school, we have a problem. You can't argue that."

But the officer has a problem of his own. His superiors have

warned him not to make public statements because other government officials have lost their jobs for speaking out.

“When you’ve got kids running to law enforcement because the school is failing them, because they’re not sure they can talk to their parents, that tells you how bad it is. And I can’t speak up. Because I’m a law enforcement officer, I want to speak up for them, but I can’t,” he said. “My hands are tied. I’m here to take bullets for them, and there’s a good chance I may have to, because we don’t have enough common sense to stand up and say this is not right.”

A community silenced

Citizens United for Students’ Rights and Liberties garnered nearly 1,000 signatures (in a town of 10,000 people) on a petition urging their school district not to adopt the Obama administration’s guidelines, and instead ensure “the safety, privacy, and modesty of all of our students.” They presented the petition at a school board meeting.

But the board welcomed Drew Bracken, a lawyer at Ahlers & Cooney, which represents about half of the state’s districts, and Nate Monson, executive director of the LGBT advocacy group Iowa Safe Schools, who both poo-pooed the petition in the Des Moines Register.

And after months of hand wringing, in a school board meeting earlier this week, the Fairfield School District decided to ignore the petition and voted 5-2 to adopt the federal guidelines as policy.

Furthermore, Meador told TFL, “Nate Monson referred to [the Citizens group] as a ‘hate group’ on Facebook. He called the Alliance Defending Freedom a ‘hate group.’ We had gotten 1,000 signatures of people in town opposed to this policy, and he referred to all of those community members as a ‘hate group.’”

And therein lies the rub: It’s not only the students of

Fairfield who feel they're being bullied into silence, but the adults as well.

TFL spoke to multiple parents, a teacher in the district, and the aforementioned law enforcement officer, all of whom oppose the school district policy but asked not to be named for fear of their jobs or public shaming. Furthermore, after feeling burned by unfavorable local press and distrusting the Des Moines Register, which Meador accused of writing "puff pieces" in favor of transgenderism, even the leaders of the Fairfield Citizens group are refusing to speak to the media.

"People in the community are worried about saying anything because their words get twisted around," said Angela Fulton, communications director for the Citizens group. "They say you're bullying, you're hateful, you're old-fashioned. I don't feel like it would be beneficial to speak with [the media]. I absolutely don't want anyone to twist our words around, because KTVO did that."

"There's fear at all levels," Meador added. "Unfortunately, this has really affected families and friendships. I know several people who have wanted to step up, but several work for the school, and they're afraid their jobs would be in jeopardy if they stuck their necks out too much. I know business owners who are afraid to be vocal, too. Are we going to lose business if we take a stand?"

"Too many people are trying to just mind their own business," Fulton said, "For instance, a grandmother told me a few weeks ago, one of these incidents happened to her granddaughter, but the girl doesn't want to think about it, because she's going to college this year. She just wants to put it behind her. But it's gotten to the point where if parents don't say something, it's going to get worse."

Can anything be done?

In communications from the school district, Meador said,

lawyers keep insisting “the law is clear,” that all students have a right to use the facilities consistent with their gender identity, and that schools just need to get on board with the Obama administration’s interpretation of Title IX in the Dear Colleague Letter.

“But when you look at the latest case in Burlington, the court ruled against [the administration’s interpretation],” Meador said. “There have only been three or so relevant civil cases in Iowa, and they were split. It’s certainly not ‘clear.’ The [schools are] not going off the law, they’re going off an interpretation of the law.”

In fact, the Alliance Defending Freedom, an national legal alliance defending religious liberty, conducted [an analysis of current case law](#) and concluded, “Both federal and state courts have almost uniformly rejected arguments suggesting that Title IX requires schools to give students access to opposite-sex restrooms and changing areas.”

Even Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad called the Dear Colleague Letter [a “federal overreach” that “does not have the force of law” and an “unnecessary threat.”](#)

[For more on what YOU can do in YOUR school district, read TFL’s “4 Things You Can DO about School Bathroom Policies” by clicking here.](#)

Meador hopes that come next September, when three of the board members are up for re-election, they can be replaced with candidates more responsive to the community’s concerns.

For Fairfield parent Nicole Spalla, however, she’s not waiting until next year. She’s part of a community prayer group hoping God will bring about a change of heart that can transform Fairfield.

“Long before this controversy erupted, we started praying for the school, for churches to unite, for revival for the city,”

Spalla told TFL. "We kept feeling something big was going to happen, but didn't know what. Since this happened, we meet twice a month – or more when there's board meetings – and we pray for what's going on and for all those who are speaking publicly.

"This is so much bigger than just the transgender issue," she continued. "We're seeing churches, pastors, and parents coming together. Too many churches have such a spirit of complacency, and there's still an awakening that has to happen for people to stand up and stand strong. It's time for people to realize you can't just go to church and sit. We're praying for people to be set on fire to do the work needed to take back our community spiritually."

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