



ACROSS THE HALL

How trans students are distanced from their peers

The number of openly transgender people in the nation grows every year, and so does the population of trans students at Creek. For trans kids, every day is a battle between their outer and inner selves, every new face another person they have to come out to. They walk through the halls with a spotlight on their backs. A simple thing like a name is a massive source of stress. Here is what a few of them have to say.

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The Trans Student Experience

The experience of trans students is a paradox. They are constantly watched and scrutinized by their peers for their identity, but few people know the full extent of what it's like to be a transgender kid at Creek.

In sophomore Bee Henke's experience, uneducated people are most likely not going to listen to them regarding transgender issues. "I mostly avoid the topic altogether," they said. Sometimes the issue is less about not understanding, and more about having never encountered the topic at all.

"Some have never met a trans person before," senior Karter LaBarre said. "So I sometimes have some educating to do. Let me tell you about a little thing called gender dysphoria."

Dysphoria is the sense of distress caused when there is a difference between a person's gender identity and sex assigned at birth. Dysphoria is so central to the day-to-day existence of trans people, and it's difficult for cis people to understand it.

"Dysphoria for me is a bruise," Henke said. "You get punched, deal with the shock, and then it's over. But later you realize, 'Ow. That really hurts.'"

Even simple things like going to the bathroom are risky, stressful, complicated endeavors for trans students.

"I always prefer to just use a gender neutral bathroom," senior Raina Hernandez said. "I refuse to use the men's restroom, but whenever I go into the women's room, I have this anxiety that someone will try to hurt me if I'm visibly trans."

None of these concepts are easy to understand to those who haven't lived them, and it's far too often that this lack of knowledge tips over into transphobic bullying. The nature of being trans means that every transphobic interaction is a deeply personal attack, and those interactions are plentiful in the hostile high-school environment.

"My things were stolen because I dressed overly androgynous," Henke said. "I've been

called slurs when holding my significant other's hand. If I talked about all of my experiences in detail, we'd be here all day."

Hallways are a particular magnet for transphobia. Every day is a new rush of strangers, and an insult thrown in the halls is likely to be disciplined.

"There's a sense of dread," Henke said. "Is this the day they stare, bark, or call me a f*****, or is this the day they leave me alone?"

Even classrooms aren't an escape from hostility. Days that trans students have to deal with a substitute who doesn't know them are painful and nerve-wracking.

"I was newly out and we had a substitute in class that day," Henke said. "I kindly said 'Here, but I go by Bee' when they called on me. The next student in attendance decided to mock me and say 'Here, but I go by Toaster.' I felt my face go red and my body started to crumble."

Luckily, sometimes adults are able to recognize the situation and give students some support.

"I was about to have a dysphoria-induced panic attack," Henke said, "But then the sub said, 'I've only been a substitute at this school for a couple of years, but I'm aware that this school treats everyone here with respect. This is a

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Senior Raina Hernandez

warning."

Every bit of support counts, especially because the voices of transgender people are often overshadowed by cisgender voices, many of which don't understand the gravity of trans issues.

"You can't just say we're equal when we're not," LaBarre said. "The whole reason we're fighting is because we're not equal. We're a minority, and sometimes it's easy to forget that when we surround ourselves with other queer people."

Things like Spectrum and other activism clubs give minority students a voice.

"Being able to do the work that we do at Spectrum has really empowered me," Hernandez said. "It's empowered me to speak for other people like myself and try to move towards a better future."

How the Name Change Process Is an Obstacle

A major piece of the trans experience is choosing a name that better fits your identity than the one you were legally given. While not all trans people change their names, it can be an important step in affirming their transition. At school, there are a few places where names appear, and some are more difficult to change than others.

It's not too difficult to switch your name in the yearbook or on IDs, students report.

"All you have to do is go to Activities and ask them to change it and then it'll all be good," senior Raina Hernandez said.

According to Yearbook advisor Michelle Scott, the process of changing a name in the yearbook involves submitting a form to the Activities office by the end of November. She says having the correct names is vital to having an accurate yearbook.

"[The yearbook] is an item meant to contain the experiences and memories for that school year. In order for the book to accurately tell the stories of this year it needs to represent students and who they

are," Scott said. "A person's name is so closely linked to their identity and personal story and if it is not accurate in the yearbook then we don't have an item that truly records Creeks history."

Where it gets more difficult is on official, district-run platforms. The name students were originally registered under is what appears on PowerSchool, Google, Schoology, student rosters, and anything else connected to district databases. This forces trans students into sometimes difficult situations, correcting teachers or fellow students when the wrong name is used. And it puts uncomfortable interactions at the front of many kids' relationships with teachers or other adults.

"Before school starts I have to email all my teachers and say, 'Hello, my name is Karter. I use he/him pronouns. Please respect it. Thank you. Bye,'" senior Karter

LaBarre said. "And then it's like a 50/50 shot as to whether it helps. Sometimes they respond. Other times, they just don't respond. And then I don't know if I'm gonna get deadnamed in class."

Some teachers use forms at the beginning of the semester for students to input their correct name and pronouns. This erases some of the direct uncomfortability, but doesn't fix everything.

"I had this anxiety of going in for the first day and being called the wrong name and having to say 'Hey, I actually go by Raina,'" Hernandez said. "It honestly made me sick sometimes. I hated thinking about it."

To change their name on PowerSchool, students go through their counselor, who then connects the student with the Registrar's Office. Assistant Principal Marcus McDavid, the Registrar, works with stu-

"I don't know if I'm gonna get deadnamed in class."

Senior Karter LaBarre

dents and their parents to make the decision to change a name on PowerSchool. Recently, the district implemented a new system of changing names in PowerSchool, where registrars will work directly with students, rather than just counselors.

Under the new system, implemented near the end of first quarter, McDavid will now work with every single student requesting a name change, rather than just processing the paperwork. Once these meetings are done, the actual name change isn't difficult. It's "just about pushing a button," McDavid says, done by either McDavid or Principal Ryan Silva. But what can become a roadblock for many students is who has to be involved with the decision: legal guardians.

"You need to have both of your parents sign off on it," sophomore Bee Henke said. "If I really asked, I could probably get one of my parents on board. It's a little uncomfortable to think about."

For Henke, parent involvement makes changing their name not plausible. But that's not all that can stand in the way. Another roadblock is that changing a name in PowerSchool can conflict with out-of-school records, like test scores.

"It took me longer to get my SAT scores; I waited until late July to get my SAT scores," Hernandez said.

Even for school records, having a different name on paper for different school years can make sending documents to colleges a challenge.

"Counselors said name change can mess up your entire college application process," LaBarre said. "All of your past few years' grades will be under your deadname, and new things are gonna be

with this new name, and it might just not show an academic record for the past few years. It's just a pain. There's so many things, and red tape, red tape, red tape."

McDavid hopes that even when it's not possible to get an official name change, adults at school will still be respectful of student's preferences. "If we want to make a change in PowerSchool, we have to have a parent agree," he said. "However, if the parent doesn't agree, I think that there are plenty of educators here who, when a kid walks up to us and says, 'My name is such-and-such,' we're gonna honor that."

Nonetheless, changing an official name in PowerSchool can be an important step for trans students to feel more safe and comfortable in school, and not having the ability to do it can be extremely uncomfortable.

"I do not have my name changed in PowerSchool," Henke said. "It's very dysphoric and distracting from important schoolwork sites such as anything Google [related]."

And for students who have been able to make the change, it can be relieving to remove the step of manually reporting the correct name to everyone.

"People call me by my actual name now and I don't have to correct subs, it's great," Hernandez said.

Counselor Susan Swisher works with students on name change, and emphasizes the importance of the process for students' identities. "Some students may have strong emotional responses to their legal names and it can be difficult or painful for them to be addressed in school by their legal names," Swisher said via email. "For students who

have carefully thought through the process, I think the opportunity to make the name change can help support them mentally and emotionally."

Still, challenges in the process still make it too difficult for some students, sometimes preventing them from trying it at all.

"We had multiple in-depth conversations about it," LaBarre said about discussions with his counselor. "I got the form and everything. And then I ended up deciding not to do it."

Swisher says that sometimes the official process can be too complicated, and suggests an alternative.

"Because this process can be complicated, it seems like offering an option that would meet the needs of some students is to allow students to list a 'preferred name' in Powerschool," Swisher said. "This might be appropriate for students who still want to keep their legal name, but may wish to be called by their middle name or a different first name rather than their legal first name."

So what do students wish was different?

Some say that just having the ability to switch a name on some platforms, such as Google Drive, would make a difference. Often, when students work with classmates on projects, their Google name is immediately visible, even if it's not the name students wish to be known by. This can lead to discomfort and alienation. On non-school accounts, users can change their Google name whenever they want. But the district network prevents students from doing this, even if some say it would help fix the problem.

Some students also wish the process of changing a name on district databases was just easier as a whole. It can often feel unnecessarily complicated, with too many steps and roadblocks to be effective.

"Make name change easier," LaBarre said. "Come on. It's such a nonsense process."



15
students have changed their name in PowerSchool during 2022 so far

"I would like to be able to have at least the Google aspect of name changing open to students."

Sophomore Bee Henke

APPROACHING THE PROCESS: Most students' first step in changing their name on school platforms is to approach their counselor. Counselors, like Erin McClure (right) then connect students with the registrar, who oversees the actual process. "I think it [helps] many students avoid the discomfort of having to tell teachers and classmates that they would like to use a name other than the one listed in Powerschool," counselor Susan Swisher said.

