

Parents of gender non-conforming students closely watch transgender discrimination lawsuit

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(FOX 9) - In the wake of a transgender student discrimination lawsuit against Anoka-Hennepin Schools, parents of gender non-conforming students across Minnesota school districts say they are hopeful for change.

“Every parent is going to worry about their child no matter what, it’s just the parent of a transgender or gender non-conforming student has to worry more,” said Pam Riddle, a concerned mother of a student in the Anoka-Hennepin school district.

For two years, Riddle has urged the Anoka-Hennepin School Board to create a more inclusive environment LGBTQ students.

“We need a gender inclusive policy in Anoka Hennepin,” Riddle insisted.

Attorney General and the Minnesota Department of Human Rights earlier this week both [joined a lawsuit](#) accusing the district of discriminating against a transgender student by not allowing him to change in the locker room with his peers.

In response, Anoka-Hennepin Schools maintains the district is confident its actions adhered to state and federal law.

"The use of restrooms and locker rooms are determined on a case-by-case basis," read a statement in part. "This approach is consistent with guidance from the National School Boards Association and the Minnesota School Boards Association."

“Being a member of the African American community, it reminds me of separate but equal,” said Zaylore Stout, a Twin Cities attorney.

Stout led a successful campaign to establish a gender inclusion policy in St. Louis Park last year. The effort made it the first suburb in Minnesota to adopt the protective policy. Stout says, in these cases the difficulty often ends up being “urban versus rural.”

“Unfortunately, there’s fear on both sides,” said Stout. “Some of these school districts fear that they’re going to be sued if they pass a policy to protect transgender and gender non-conforming students, or they’re going to be sued on the other end if they don’t pass a policy.”

Traci Laliberte, whose son attends school in St. Paul where a gender inclusion policy is already enforced is watching the case closely. She says her son just wants to be treated like everyone else.

“He just wants to go to school, go to the bathroom, participate in extracurricular activities, have friends and advocate and struggle and have success like any other kid,” said Laliberte.

Laliberte and Riddle say they feel having different rules across school districts over how LGBTQ students should be treated, only isolates them even more.

“We shouldn’t pay them to take it case-by-case,” said Riddle. “Just be done with it. Look at Minneapolis, St. Paul. Richfield. You know? Nothing’s gone wrong there.”

“It’s an unfair way to have them have to grow up,” said Laliberte.