Dear NC State Superintendent Mark Johnson,

Thank you for your March 15 and March 23 letters to parents, caretakers and educators about the North Carolina schools’ response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We could not agree more that the safety and well-being of all of our students is a top priority that will require all of us working together to overcome challenges that may have seemed insurmountable in the past. This letter is about tackling one of these challenges and doing our best to support transgender students in North Carolina during this unprecedented shift for our school systems.

Since 2017 or before, school districts and nonprofits across the state have requested that the Department of Public Instruction update the state-mandated PowerSchool student information system so that it is no longer set up in a way that violates the safety and privacy of transgender students. Specifically, they have asked for ‘Legal Name’ fields separate from the ‘Name’ fields; for a ‘Legal Gender’ field separate from the ‘Gender’ field; and for the gender fields to include a ‘non-binary’ option in addition to ‘male’ and ‘female.’

Without these corrections in place, students who are transgender are at a constant risk of having their transgender identity revealed to others at school without their consent, which is a violation of the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) as well as state and district privacy policies. The privacy violation may occur through a teacher reading the attendance roster, other students seeing the name on an online test, an office worker running a report, or any number of other ways in which PowerSchool is used for student lists and records.

For most transgender students, being confronted with one’s birth name (referred to commonly in the trans community as one’s ‘dead name’) can trigger feelings of anxiety and dysphoria. When the disclosure is made public, they may fear for their safety as well. According to a 2017 GLSEN survey of LGBTQ students in North Carolina, 90% regularly hear anti-LGBTQ language in schools. Nearly 3 out 4 have experienced verbal harassment, 1 out of 3 have experienced physical harassment, and 14% have experienced a physical assault at school.

Other states that use PowerSchool have had their systems set up to protect the privacy of transgender students since 2015 or earlier. Many North Carolina schools and districts have been more than patient with NC DPI, putting in place time-intensive processes to manually correct rosters, lists and records where they can. Families and students have been forced to accept loss of privacy and other harms as students are confronted with their birth name,
particularly in online testing and discussion forums. Many times their best coping strategy is to opt out, skipping the test or taking a zero grade for the online part of the course, rather than having their transgender status revealed.

But now our time has run out. As North Carolina schools shift to at-home learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all of the online learning platforms, chat rooms, discussion forums, and virtual testing sites are generating student usernames, visible to other students and faculty, based on the legal name in PowerSchool. Across the state, students are finding out that their classmate Janelle was once named James, that Aaron used to be Emily, that Latisha was Lavon. It is impossible to describe the social, emotional, and psychological harms that this mass violation of privacy may cause.

We know how much local school systems have on their plates right now, and while we are encouraging educators to double-check and correct student usernames, a system-wide fix is far more efficient. One decision from your office, one system update, and 2,500 schools across the state will automatically have this problem solved.

And so, with the goal of keeping our students' safety as a top priority, we urge you to:

1. Request that PowerSchool immediately begin an update of the NC system that:
   ○ Creates ‘Legal Name’ fields separate from the ‘Name’ fields;
   ○ Sets up documents, lists, online systems, and reports to use the ‘Name’ field unless the document legally requires the Legal Name;
   ○ Creates a ‘Legal Gender’ field separate from the ‘Gender’ field and uses the ‘Gender’ field to list gender in all visible lists and reports, unless legally required otherwise;
   ○ Adds a ‘non-binary’ option to the drop-down list in gender fields.
2. Provide the update to North Carolina schools as soon as possible (and no later than the summer 2020 PowerSchool update), along with guidance and technical support for implementation.
3. Immediately provide guidance for schools and school districts, explaining the best practices and reasons for using students’ affirmed names and genders, in both in-person and virtual environments.

Ultimately, these are issues of fundamental safety and privacy for our students, which we agree are of the highest importance and require us to work together in new ways. Thank you for your cooperation and prompt action.

Signed,
309 community members from across North Carolina
[See full list of signatories on subsequent pages]
### Signatories

#### School Administrators, Faculty, and Staff in North Carolina

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>David Thompson</td>
<td>Director of Student Services</td>
<td>Abigail Hessling</td>
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<td>Heather Ramsey</td>
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<td>Holly Hobbs</td>
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<th>Laini Boyd</th>
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### Counselors, Therapists, and Social Workers in North Carolina

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<tr>
<th>Kate Bradford</th>
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<th>Sally Ryman</th>
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<td>Michelle Butler</td>
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<td>Ami Greene</td>
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<td>Jay Kyte</td>
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<td>Carrie Magnuson</td>
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<td>Public Health Specialist</td>
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Kathryn Blount
Social Worker

Tiffany Brooks
Social Worker

Alyson Curley-Dempsey
Social Worker

Dana Dahringer
Social Worker

Erich Roberts
Social Worker

Katrina Usher
Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor

Shelly Roeder
Social Worker

Holly Savoy
Psychologist

Pegg Rozzell
Social Worker

North Carolina Parents, Guardians, and Students

Jennifer Abbott
Alix Adrian
Stefania Arteaga
April B
Michael Ball
Jennifer Barbour
Ann Barnes
Gina Beaudry
Megan Bishop
Jennifer Boothe
Chris Bradburn
Lauren Bradley
Presley Bright
Frances Brown
Caylus Brown
Shelley Bunting
Cacye Burbach
Shelley Carleson
Travis Carter
Leeallie Carter
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Ezekiel Christopoulos
Abigail Clarkson
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DeAnna Conard
Brooke Conklin
Carol Craig
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Mary Locke
Lindsey Lughes
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Dawn Prince
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Matt Rue
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Jesse Ryan
Erin Sebelius
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Dawn Simpson
Georgia Springer
Linda Stroupe
Paige Sullivan
Helen Svoboda-Barber
Serena Switzer
Sagan Thacker
Catrina Tomsich
Robert Tuck
Elijah Tuck
Laura Tucker
Cynthia Turner
Sage Turner
Rebekah Visco
Alexandra Vrtunski
Drew Walley
Christine Weingarten
Rachel Wellelsdick
Sarah Wells
Alexander White

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Other Professionals and Community Members in North Carolina

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Richard Deutsch
Abby Deutsch
Nena Ditrani
Dylan Dixon
Rachel Dove
Kelly Morrow
Sophie Moseley
Nick Novak
Lili O’Neill
Amy Paleno
Jennifer Peterson
Terry Pollard
Janet Willis
Katie Wilson
Adams Wood
Susan Wood
Lyla Woodward

Adilene Almeyda
Emma Anderson
Owen Auman
Lewis Baylor
Martha Beach
Alessandrio Benavides-Nazario
Kathryn Bennett
Sterling Bentley
Maria Buchanan
Keslie Carrón
Shoshanna Carroll
Sarah Carroll
Melissa Anne Christians
Jasper Christie
Nancy Ciaffone
Cheryl Citro
Leo Coffey
Leslie Cohen
Liam Collins
Celeste Collins
Donna Criswell
Kim Currin
Sam Davis
Mack Dennis
Candace Dewith
Dorothy Donaldson
Elizabeth Evans
Alina Ever
Carolyn Faucher
Margo Faulk
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Al Murray
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