

November 19, 2009

Dear Parents of K-8 Children,

On Wednesday, December 2, from 7:00-9:00 pm, The Berkeley School will welcome educators Stephanie Brill and Joel Baum to our Depot. Stephanie is the founder of Gender Spectrum, an innovative educational organization dedicated to providing training for schools focused on creating support for people of all genders and gender identifications.

We are hopeful that as many of you as possible will attend this important evening. Stephanie and Joel are moving and inspiring speakers. Our faculty and administration have been privileged to hear Stephanie speak on two occasions here at TBS. We have been so impressed that we have expanded our commitment to this education. We have several goals in mind in doing so.

First, we are hopeful that you will share our enthusiasm for opening our minds to greater understanding of people who place themselves in a variety of positions on the gender spectrum. Second, we want to introduce you to the classroom program that Stephanie and Joel will be presenting to our K-8 children on December 3 and 4.

In recent years, the taboo around discussing transgender identity has lifted in the media and in academia. Most American high schools, colleges and universities have LGBT organizations. In many of our major universities, there are full departments focused on LGBT studies. Teaching young children that every human being has an equal right to celebrate his or her personal self-identity is a fundamental step in interrupting prejudice before it has a chance to develop.

Following their training with Gender Spectrum, the Park Day School published a policy paper describing their school's process and increased self-awareness. The paper is entitled "When it Counts: Talking about Transgender Identity and Gender Fluidity in Elementary School." This paper is available online at www.genderspectrum.org (click on "Family Conference" for more information).

Our invitation to Gender Spectrum to come into our classrooms is rooted in our commitment to expand and enrich our community's conception of diversity. It is rooted also in our understanding that it is not enough to say that we are a diverse community; in order to live that promise, we must show our students the way. Having conducted training in many Bay Area schools, Stephanie assures us that it is the adult community which is most in need of training; she adds, "The children find this learning easy...and the younger they are, the easier it is for them to grasp."

Here are a few questions that we thought you might have. We have done our best to answer them, but if you still feel you would like to talk with one of us, please feel free to contact us.

Why would you include Kindergarten and first grade students in this sort of education?

We include these very young students because they come to gender variance conversations with the greatest of ease. They have no trouble comprehending that some girls like to play with toys that are usually thought to be boys' toys and that boys sometimes like to play with dolls or pretend to be the mom in a story. They love the topic of boys and girls dressing up as someone they don't

seem to be. Stephanie's conversations with these children will be focused on these concrete examples of how boys and girls can differ in how they like to play and dress. She is also making the assumption that in all schools, there are children who have, by the age of 5, already begun to recognize in themselves some measure of gender variance. A program like this embraces those children and their friends in a circle of acceptance...self-acceptance and community acceptance.

Isn't gender difference about being "gay" or "lesbian"? Aren't K-5 children too young to be exposed to these ideas?

The idea that gender and sexual identities are one and the same is a common misconception. Our program is about helping little children develop a comfort in sensing "who I am inside" and how it fits with "who I am outside." Very young children can easily understand that sometimes men love men and women love women; certainly our gay and lesbian parents, and those of us with gay and lesbian friends or relatives, have been discussing this matter-of-factly with our children all along. However, Stephanie and Joel will not be talking about sexuality, in terms of either parental relationships or children's gender.

Are there gender-variant children at TBS?

Yes.

How long will the Gender Spectrum conversations be?

In the K-3 classrooms, about 45 minutes

In the 4-8 classrooms, between 45 minutes and 60 minutes

Again, we welcome your questions and we hope to see you on December 2!

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