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Months ago, Riverside County school board quietly rejected transgender policy

Before such rules grabbed headlines, trustees defeated proposal to tell parents if their child is transgender

By **SARAH HOFMANN** | shofmann@scng.com |

PUBLISHED: September 3, 2023 at 7:15 a.m. | UPDATED: September 3, 2023 at 7:46 a.m.

This summer, several Southern California school boards have [approved or discussed policies to notify parents if their children identify as transgender](#).

But months before the emotional and contentious meetings in the [Chino Valley](#), [Murrieta Valley](#), [Temecula Valley](#) and [Orange](#) school districts, a similar policy came before the Riverside County school board.

In April, the Riverside County Board of Education voted on a [parental rights resolution](#) that, among other things, would have notified parents/guardians “of

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Board member Barbara Hale, who represents the Temecula Valley, Murrieta Valley districts and part of the Lake Elsinore school district, voted yes. Hale, who co-founded and is executive director of the [Sycamore Academy of Science and Cultural Arts](#) in Wildomar, could not be reached for comment Friday, Sept. 1.

The county board oversees the Riverside County Office of Education, whose duties include providing special education instruction, Head Start and career education. It also runs education programs for migrants and youths at juvenile hall. The office and board has no authority over policies in individual school districts.

At the April meeting, several speakers opposed that section of the resolution, voicing concerns about the potential negative consequences for transgender students and the legality of notifying parents when students seek counseling. At least one speaker supported the policy.

“I will express that this came from constituents,” Hale said of the resolution. “It’s greatly changed from what I received, though.”

Other trustees noted the importance of parental involvement, but were against the proposal.

Board member Ben Johnson said that doing things without involving more people “can cause more harm than good.”

Trustee Bruce Dennis said the resolution should go through a committee to be done right and added that it conflicted with California Education Code 49602.

“Any information of a personal nature disclosed by a pupil 12 years of age or older in the process of receiving counseling from a school counselor is confidential,” Dennis said, reading from the code.

Board member Elizabeth Romero called the resolution’s content “very problematic.”

Romero addressed any students who may be watching the meeting: “You will not be outed, and you’re cared (for) and loved just like everyone else.”

Hale said she didn’t see an issue with the resolution, with the possible exception of the part about gender pronouns.

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In March, Republican Assemblymember Bill Essayli, who represents part of Riverside County, [put forth Assembly Bill 1314](#). It [sought to require](#) schools to notify parents within three days if employees learn a student is identifying as a gender that doesn't align with their birth certificate or other official records.

In April, the bill was [denied a committee hearing](#).

The county board's resolution came before a series of similar school board policies that drew national attention.

At a [fraught July board meeting](#), the Chino Valley Unified School District board adopted a policy to inform parents within three days if their child asks to use a different name or pronouns, or access gender-separated sports, restrooms or changing rooms that do not match their assigned gender at birth.

The Murrieta Valley Unified School District board [followed suit](#) in August. And 12 days later, [so did](#) the neighboring Temecula Valley Unified School District board.

In both cases, the boards adopted policies that mirror Chino Valley's. The Orange Unified School District board is also considering such a policy, which [may be voted on](#) Thursday, Sept. 7.

Some California school boards have seen a shift after the election of new board members, [some of whom were backed by groups](#) including [a conservative PACs](#) and the ["Parent Revolt"](#) program that supports Republican candidates running for educational offices.

Also, three statewide ballot initiatives [were announced last week](#). One would require California schools to tell parents if their child identifies as transgender, another would ban athletes who weren't born female from competing in girls' sports, and the third would prohibit certain types of health care for minors, including the use of puberty blockers and genital surgeries.

"This topic will not go away," Riverside County trustee Ray "Coach" Curtis said at the April session. "I think we need to be on top of the topic and have input from all areas, and Riverside County, I really believe, will lead the parent rights."

But, he said, individual rights were important, too.

"We will do what's best for everyone."

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Sarah Hofmann | Reporter

Sarah Hofmann is a reporter based in Southern California. She grew up in West Virginia and attended Occidental College for cognitive science and Columbia University for writing. Before joining The Press-Enterprise and Southern California News Group, she interned at The Herald-Dispatch and volunteered with the Covid Tracking Project.

shofmann@scng.com

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