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I am a parent of three cisgender children in Maine schools and a teacher of all students who enter my classroom.

When I was a child, people thought I was a boy (even my great uncle). My mother dressed me in Toughskin corduroys and red rubber boots. I had a bowl cut done at home.

It truly bothered me when people referred to me as “he” or “him”. I knew that all I had to do was convince my mom to let me grow my hair out and to wear dresses to school.

Watching students grow into the confidence to ask people to call them a name and gender with which they identify mirrors my experience - but requires much greater strength. Students who are misgendered or misnamed suffer humiliation and pain, leading to severe mental health challenges. My good friend, who is a transgender male, was suicidal and alcoholic prior to transitioning. He is now the father of two children and a loving husband to his wife. He is fully employed in the trades and mentally well and is sober. It would be horrible to remove that identity from his life, likely returning him to illness. Why would we do it to children?

Also, how many of you have nicknames? Do you ask people to call you by your nickname? How different is that than calling students by the names they choose? In fact, if you approve this act, you would also need to use the pre-adoption name of adopted children, right? What about children whose last names change as part of parental right terminations? Would we return them to their birth names? I do not write my birth name on my paperwork. My name has changed three times due to marriage and divorce and remarriage. Why would you want to call a child by a name that is no longer their identity?