



Superintendent Aldarelli, Board President Patel, and Edison Township Board of Education,

We are writing to you today to share our deep disappointment in Edison Board of Education's rash decision to remove the critical transgender student guidance policy. This policy, which was borne of [legislation](#) signed by then-Governor Chris Christie directed the Commissioner of the Department of Education to develop standards for the care and protection of transgender and nonbinary students in New Jersey Public Schools.

From this direction came a close and concentrated study and survey of the many issues faced by our trans and nonbinary students, culminating in the issuance of transgender student guidance [policy 5756](#) in 2019, which was voluntarily adopted by school boards across the state.

There has been no reported negative effect of this policy since its implementation and the current push in New Jersey to remove this policy does nothing besides signal to our most vulnerable students that they're not respected by the Edison Board of Education. It is still illegal to disclose a student's orientation or identity against their will.

We, the undersigned, represent grass-roots organizations helping the LGBTQ+ youth.

[Desi Rainbow Parents and Allies](#), founded in Edison by the parent of a transgender child, represents South Asian American LGBTQIA+ people and their families across the USA. We have firsthand knowledge of the health and safety risks faced by transgender students. Desi Rainbow has served more than 2000 LGBTQIA+ community members and their families with direct support and services since 2020, and we are deeply familiar how LGBTQIA+ South Asian Americans have to perform a balancing act between living free, authentic lives while navigating stigma and exclusion from their own family and community, and battling discrimination as immigrants and sexual & gender minorities. We also work closely with AANHPI community based organizations and are aware that a large portion of the student population in Edison is Asian American and South Asian American and have deep concerns about the health and safety of multiply marginalized youth whose intersectional identity (of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality) puts them at risk.

[Shiv's Third Eye](#), founded by Livingston, NJ family of a sweet, kind, bright 14-year old [Shiv Kulkarni](#) who tragically lost his life to suicide in July 2021. Through Shiv's short life, we saw how even a seemingly thriving, intelligent, socially successful youth could silently struggle with identity and acceptance, underscoring the critical need for mental health support for young people. LGBTQ+ youth, including those who are transgender and nonbinary, are particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges. Through our work in the community across NJ, we have a number of successful young adults who have shared how they have been saved by a trusted adult offering a safe space (a teacher, a counselor). Having someone like that can be life-changing, giving them the time and space to build self-confidence and self-acceptance.



The Mental Health and Well-Being of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) LGBTQ Youth, a report released by The Trevor Project, showed that in 2020 -

- 55% of Indian American LGBTQ+ youth were not out to at least one parent about their sexual orientation because of the social and cultural stigma surrounding LGBTQ+ identity.
- 39% of Indian American LGBTQ youth seriously considered suicide
- AAPI transgender and nonbinary youth reported significantly higher rates of suicide risk compared to cisgender AAPI LGBTQ youth, half of whom seriously considering suicide and more than 1 in 5 reporting a suicide attempt in the past year.
- 14% of Indian American LGBTQ youth reported having been physically threatened or harmed due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Only 10% of Indian American LGBTQ youth have access to affirming spaces in community events, spaces where they feel safe.
- Only 15% of Indian American LGBTQ youth have access to affirming spaces in their homes.

As community based organizations, Garden State Equality, Desi Rainbow and Shiv's Third Eye can attest, young people navigating the intersection of race, culture, and LGBTQIA+ identity face unique challenges that require understanding and support—not actions that make them feel unsafe or unwelcome. It is clear that forcibly outing students may risk their mental health and safety in significant ways.

Edison's students deserve better than this politically-motivated move, which was done in a manner that provided no transparency or opportunity for public comment. The majority of Edison community members, including immigrants like us, support diversity and inclusion. Many of us are LGBTQIA+ ourselves or have loved ones who identify as LGBTQIA+ and are invested in making our community a welcoming and affirming place for all LGBTQIA+ students.

We ask that you reinstate [policy 5756](#) immediately, and engage in learning and growth that will result in better outcomes for our most vulnerable populations of students.

Sincerely,  
(Constituent Name)