**RIPCOA Transgender policy 9/1/15**

**DEFINITIONS**:

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

1. Gender identity: A person’s deeply-felt internal sense of being male or female

2. Gender Expression: A person’s external characteristics and behaviors that are socially defined as either masculine or feminine, such as dress, mannerisms, speech patterns and social interactions

3. Transgender Person: A person whose gender identity does not match the sex assigned to him or her at birth.

There is a spectrum in gender identity, gender expression, and in medical care for transgender persons. When an individual has negative feelings about their biological gender and secondary gender characteristics that cause clinically significant distress or impairment they may be described as gender dysphoric. Not all transgender persons are gender dysphoric or all the way towards the opposite cross gender spectrum. Typically, a transgender person who is born female bodied but identifies as male is referred to as a transgender man or (female to male) transmasculine person. A transgender person who is born male bodied but identifies as female is referred to as a transgender woman or male-to-female transfeminine person. There is a wide range of gender identities and gender expressions that are best determined by the individual.

4. Intersex Person: “Intersex” is a general term used to indicate a person born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy and/or chromosome pattern that doesn’t seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male. This may be the result of several different medical conditions involving chromosomal variations, hormonal variations, ambiguous genitalia, and/or anatomy that include both male and female characteristics. The medical term for this condition is a Disorder of Sexual Development of “DSD”. “Intersex” is not the same of “transgender,” although some people identity as both intersex and transgender. However, the two groups may face similar situations in needing to change gender designations for the purposes of participation in school activities.

**CORE VALUES**

The RIPCOA (RI Principal’s Committee on Athletics) Identity policy has been developed based on the following core values:

• Recognizing the value of extra-curricular athletics for all students

• Emphasizing that participation in extra-curricular athletics is not just allowed, but encouraged for all students

• Adhering to Rhode Island state and federal law regarding gender equity and educational opportunity

• Operating from the presumption that all students will have access to RIPCOA sanctioned programs

• Enacting a policy that will maximize flexibility and privacy with minimal restrictions

• Creating a level playing field for all students

• Reducing economic barriers, especially for minority populations

• Addressing the concerns of parents, teachers and coaches through an educational component

• Acknowledging that the RIPCOA policy will likely need to be reviewed and revised to reflect increased medical understanding and evolving societal norms

• Grounding a policy in sound medical practice

• Preserving *existing practices regarding cross gender participation in sports (i.e. both boys and girls participate in Wrestling)*

• Providing a space for intersex and transgender students to safely exist and thrive

• Working to eliminate bullying and harassment of students through education and understanding

**PHILOSOPHY OF GENDER IDENTITY PARTICIPATION**

RIPCOA facilitates middle school sports in the state of Rhode Island.  RIPCOA allows participation for all students regardless of their gender or expression.  The purpose of this policy is to designate a set of criteria in which student-athletes are able to compete on a level playing field in a safe, competitive and friendly environment, free of discrimination. Fundamental fairness, as well as most local, state and federal rules and regulations, requires schools to provide transgender student-athletes with equal opportunities to participate in athletics. This policy creates a framework in which this participation may occur in a safe and healthy manner that is fair to all competitors.

**GENDER IDENTITY PROCESS FOR PARTICIPATION**

All students will have the opportunity to participate in RIPCOA sanctioned activities in a manner that is consistent with their gender identity, irrespective of the gender listed on a student’s records. Once a student has been granted eligibility to participate in the sport consistent with his/her gender identity, the eligibility is granted and applied consistently for the duration of the student’s participation in middle school and does not need to be renewed every sports season or school year.  All discussion and documentation will be kept confidential, and the proceedings will be sealed unless the student and family make a specific request.

Notice to Schools

The student and/or parents shall contact the school administrator or athletic director indicating that the student has a consistent gender identity different than the gender listed on the student’s school registration records, and that the student desires to participate in activities in a manner consistent with his/her gender identity.

Notice to RIPCOA

The school administrator shall contact the RIPCOA Chairperson, who will assist the school and student in preparation and completion of the RIPCOA gender identity eligibility process.

Determination of eligibility

The student’s parent(s) will submit a request to the RIPCOA Gender Identity Eligibility Committee (GIEC) specifically established to determine gender eligibility. RIPCOA will convene the committee members as expeditiously as possible.  The committee will review all pertinent data and make a decision by consensus.  The GIEC will be comprised of a minimum of three of the following persons one of whom must be from the physician or mental health profession category:

a. Physician with experience in gender identity health care and the world Professional Association for Transgender health (WPATH) Standards of Care

b. Psychiatrist, psychologist or licensed mental health professional familiar with the World Professional Association for Transgender health (WPATH) Standards of Care

c. School administrator from a non-appealing school

d. RIPCOA Executive Director

e. RIPCOA Chair or Co-chair

f. Advocate familiar with Gender Identity and Expression issues

Documentation

The appealing student should provide the Eligibility Committee with the following documentation and information:

a. Current transcript and school registration information

b. Documentation of student’s consistent gender identification (this would include affirmed written statements from parent/guardian, student and/or health care provider)

c. Any other pertinent documentation of information

Decision

Once a decision has been reached by the GEIC, the student, his/her parent(s) participating school will be informed within an appropriate time frame.

Appeal of GIEC decision

An aggrieved student wishing to appeal the Gender Identity Eligibility Committee decision shall file a notice of appeal with the Chair of RIPCOA on or before the tenth (10th) school business day following the date of receipt of the written decision of the Gender Identity Eligibility Committee. An appeal to the RIPCOA chair shall require the chairperson to schedule a hearing before a quorum of the executive board of RIPCOA.  This board will meet within an appropriate time frame and inform the applicant of their decision in an expeditious manner.

Support for Schools

When there is confirmation of a student’s consistent gender identity the eligibility committee/RIPCOA chair will affirm the student’s eligibility to participate in RIPCOA sanctioned events subject to the same by-laws, expectations, and protocols as any other RIPCOA participant.  The student will be allowed to participate in RIPCOA events in a manner that is consistent with the student’s gender identification. RIPCOA director’s will assist schools in training and determining appropriate modifications regarding gender identity challenges.