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Elizabeth McCoy
Superintendent
Dover-Sherborn Public Schools
157 Farm Street
Dover, MA 02030
mccoye@doversherborn.org

September 17, 2026

Via Email and U.S. Mail

Re: [REDACTED] – PPRA Violation

Dear Superintendent McCoy,

I represent [REDACTED], mother of [REDACTED], who is a [REDACTED]-grade student with special needs at Dover-Sherborn High School (DSHS). I write to notify you that DSHS recently violated federal law by requiring students to answer multiple surveys that asked sensitive and inappropriate questions regarding their pronouns and gender identity and offered to conceal such information from their parents. We are filing a formal legal complaint with the federal Department of Education and demand that Dover Sherborn Public Schools remedy this situation by immediately ceasing any surveys that inquire about student gender identity without prior parental consent.

Facts

On Wednesday, September 2, [REDACTED] received two surveys via Google classroom, one from her history teacher, Ms. Melad, and one from her English teachers, Ms. Wynn and Ms. Gillis. The English survey, entitled “Intro to You,” asked students questions about themselves, but 7 of the 20 questions related to pronouns. These questions were:

- “What pronoun(s) should we use? (For example: he/him/his, she/her/hers, they/them/theirs)*This is a required question”
- “May we use these pronouns in front of the class?*”
- “May we use these pronouns when we contact home?*”
- “May we use these pronouns when talking with other staff in the building (guidance, admin, teachers, nurse, etc.)?*”
- “Would you like to follow up with us in a private conversation about your pronoun(s)?*”
- “If you answered “no” to any of these questions, please let us know what pronoun(s) you would like us to use with the listed audiences. Additionally, please let us know if this changes at any point in the year.*”



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Each of these questions featured asterisks next to them, indicating that students were required to answer them. The history survey, entitled “Getting to Know You,” asked [REDACTED] questions about herself, including “Your Preferred Name and/or Pronoun.” This question also had an asterisk next to it, indicating that it was a required question.

Ms. [REDACTED] was shocked when she saw that [REDACTED] received this survey and that these questions were required. Not only did these questions delve into issues of [REDACTED]’s sex and gender identity, which are deeply sensitive and personal, but the English survey suggested that [REDACTED]’s answers could be *concealed* from her mother (Q. 4) and asked if she wanted to have a *private conversation* with teachers about her pronouns (Q. 6). It should go without saying that a teacher soliciting a student to have a private conversation with them regarding sex and gender identity issues, without their parents’ knowledge or consent, is extremely inappropriate and violates parents’ constitutional rights. Moreover, Ms. [REDACTED] specified in the “Parental Concerns” section of [REDACTED]’s IEP that she should not be inculcated with any LGBTQ viewpoints, given their family’s religious beliefs. As a person with [REDACTED], [REDACTED] is especially impressionable and any discussion of gender identity is likely to cause her to experience gender dysphoria or to cause other negative mental health impacts.

Ms. [REDACTED] therefore immediately reached out to you and to Principal John Smith regarding these surveys and expressed her concerns that they were inappropriate and attempted to compel student speech. Principal Smith responded via email on September 2nd that he would tell the faculty that questions on pronouns should be optional. You likewise stated via email on September 3rd that you would ensure that questions regarding pronouns were voluntary, but also stated that “Staff may invite students to share their pronouns”. Neither you nor Principal Smith stated that parental consent would be required, or even that parents would be notified, before students were subjected to surveys about their pronouns. The English survey was revised for [REDACTED] to remove questions about pronouns, but Ms. [REDACTED] asked to see the updated version of the survey for other students. Ms. Wynn then sent an email to Ms. [REDACTED] on September 4th stating that she had revised the survey for other students to include an “opt-out for any question,” which therefore made it an “acceptable activity.”

[REDACTED] subsequently received another form asking for her “preferred pronouns” in Google Classroom, the “Fall Play ‘Pride & Prejudice’ Participation Sign Up,” from the drama teacher, Mrs. Bergeron. This also listed “preferred pronouns” as a required question, in spite of your assurances that such questions would not be required. This form is still up in Google Classroom.

Finally, Ms. [REDACTED] was also notified by another parent that her daughter’s history teacher, Ms. Swinson, had given a similar survey, entitled “Student Info Survey ’26-’27”. This survey asked:

- What is your name? If you go by a nickname, please write that name, too!*
- When can this name be used?
 - In Class



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- In communication with other teachers/coaches/staff at DSHS
 - In communication home to parents/guardians/family members
 - I want to have a follow up conversation with Ms. Swinson about this
 - Prefer not to answer
- I want to have a follow up conversation with Ms. Swinson about this
 - She/Her/Hers
 - He/Him/His
 - They/Them; Their/Theirs Other
 - Prefer not to answer
- The pronouns I chose above can be used:
 - In our classroom
 - When Ms. Swinson contacts home and speaks to parents/guardians/family members
 - When Ms. Swinson speaks with other teachers/coaches/staff at DSHS
 - I want to have a follow up conversation about my pronouns with Ms. Swinson
 - Prefer not to answer

While ■■■ did not receive this survey, we bring it to your attention to expose the persistent pattern among DSHS staff of asking students sensitive questions about their sex and gender identity and offering to hide their responses from parents.

Applicable Law

The Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA), codified at 20 U.S.C. § 1232h, is a federal law which requires all K-12 schools that receive federal funding to provide notice to parents of any surveys administered to students that will cover sensitive topics relating to students, including:

1. Political affiliations;
2. Mental and psychological problems of the student or the student's family;
3. Sex behaviors and attitudes;
4. Illegal, antisocial, self-incriminating, or demeaning behavior;
5. Critical appraisals of other individuals with whom respondents have close family relationships;
6. Legally recognized privileged or analogous relationships, such as those of lawyers, physicians and ministers;
7. Religious practices, affiliations or beliefs of the student or the student's parents; or
8. Income (other than that required by law to determine eligibility for participation in a program or for receiving financial assistance under such program.)¹

¹ 20 U.S.C. § 1232h(c)(2)(A).



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When a school requires students to receive such a survey, parental consent must be obtained before the survey can be administered to any minor student.² Even if a school technically allows students to opt out of a survey, any survey administered to students that covers the protected categories above is considered “required” by the Department of Education because of the pressure that minor students are likely to feel to complete such surveys.³ Therefore, an opt-out provision is not enough; schools must receive parents’ affirmative consent for the survey. A school that violates the PPRA may lose federal funding.⁴

Analysis

It is clear that by administering the English, history, and drama surveys to [REDACTED] and her classmates without parental consent, DSHS violated the PPRA. Questions about pronouns implicate students’ feelings and beliefs about their biological sex and gender identity.⁵ This would qualify as a question regarding “sex behaviors and attitudes.” In addition, since students’ struggles with gender identity are often linked to gender dysphoria, a diagnosable mental health issue, questions about gender identity could also reveal information concerning a student’s mental and psychological problems. Finally, since many students and families have strong religious beliefs regarding gender identity, asking these kinds of questions could reveal such beliefs. Since parents were not even notified of these surveys in advance, much less asked to provide consent for their children to participate, the administration of these surveys violated the PPRA.

Conclusion and Demand

To remedy this violation, we demand that DSHS commit in writing to notify parents regarding all future surveys that ask about pronouns or other questions related to gender identity and obtain parental consent before administering such surveys to students. We are attaching the complaint that we are concurrently filing with the Department of Education’s Student Privacy Policy Office. We look forward to a prompt resolution of this matter.

Very truly yours,

Sam Whiting
Legal Counsel, MLLC

² 20 U.S.C. § 1232h(b).

³ Letter to Chief State School Officers and Superintendents, U.S Department of Education, Aug. 26, 2026, https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/sites/default/files/resource_document/file/SPPO%20Back%20to%20School%20DCL_August2026_Final508.pdf.

⁴ 34 CFR § 98.10.

⁵ See Compl. at ¶¶ 55-61, Dkt. no. 1, *U.S. v. Unified Sch. Dist. No. 500*, No. 2:26-cv-02519 (D. Kan. Sept. 1, 2026).



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cc: Principal John Smith, smithj@doversherborn.org