

D-99 to install gender-neutral bathrooms

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DOWNERS GROVE – District 99 plans to add gender-neutral bathrooms and private changing stations in locker rooms at Downers Grove North and South by next year.

The Community High School District 99 Board of Education heard a presentation during its April 11 meeting from district staff who presented various reasons why the private areas are needed.

However, community members in attendance wondered whether the changes are to accommodate transgender students. D-99 parent Michael McCann said the changes could possibly be moving toward allowing boys who identify as girls to use the girls locker room.

“It seems like a topic that was kind of danced around tonight,” he said. “It seemed like the elephant in the room.”

The issue of transgender students in school locker rooms gained attention in the past year when a transgender student

Know more

For information on Community High School District 99 and the new gender-neutral bathrooms, visit csd99.org.

identifying as female battled Township High School District 211 in Palatine over the right to use the girls locker room.

The district’s April 11 presentation did not mention transgender students or any policies relating to them.

In a statement, district communications director Jill Browning said the district provides services to students regardless of gender identity and deals with student accommodations on an individual basis.

Superintendent Mark McDonald said the proposed changes were not the result of any requests but of a staff review into the needs of the students.

“In the course of my research, I found our facility limitations affect many students – in fact, far more than I expected

and for many different reasons than I considered,” he said.

District counselors said some students may want private bathrooms and changing areas because of medical conditions, body image problems and anxiety because of traumatic incidents.

“We both anticipate that having these facilities in place will further extend our combined message that students need to experience dignity and safety at both of our campuses,” Downers Grove South High School associate principal Vincent Walsh-Rock said.

McDonald said a gender-neutral bathroom is already available in each school’s nurse’s office and adding an additional one would give the students who use them another option.

He said students in the locker rooms who want to undress in a private setting use the bathroom stalls but the space is not large enough to change clothes in it.

The district’s plan will add three changing station to

each locker room at Downers Grove North High School and four changing stations to each locker room at Downers Grove South High School.

The project is estimated to cost \$16,000 to \$18,000, depending on the height of the changing room doors.

The board is not required to vote on the project, and McDonald said the district normally does not make a presentation to the board on projects of this size.

McDonald said he discussed the project openly with the board because of the public response since the project was announced.

A majority of the board supported the facility changes.

Board president Nancy Kupka and vice president Terry Pavesich said the district should explore adding the private changing areas to the pool locker rooms.

Director of operations Jim Kolodziej said finding room for the changing stalls in the pool locker room will be more difficult.