



Sunshine Law Request
from the
Missouri Attorney General's Office



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF MISSOURI

ERIC SCHMITT
April 12, 2022

Custodian of Records
Columbia Public Schools
1818 W. Worley Street
Columbia, MO 65203
Sent via email to mbaumstark@cpsk12.org

RE: Sunshine Law Request – It Gets Better

Dear Ms. Baumstark:

I write to request copies of the following public records pursuant to Chapter 610 of the Missouri Revised Statutes:

1. The Rock Bridge High GSA Club It Gets Better Project grant application, including any attachments and addendums, as submitted for inclusion on the CPS Board of Education Regular Session Meeting agenda dated 04/11/2022.¹

I request that all responsive records be produced electronically, or be made available immediately for inspection.

This request seeks documents that are in the public interest because they are likely to contribute to a better understanding of the operations or activities of Columbia Public Schools. In addition, this is not a request for commercial purposes. For these reasons, pursuant to § 610.026.1(1), RSMo, the Missouri Attorney General's Office requests a waiver of any fees associated with processing this request for records.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "James S. Atkins", written over a large, stylized blue scribble.

James S. Atkins
General Counsel

¹ Agenda item: 3(E)(5)(k) available at <https://www.cpsk12.org/Page/204#calendar54/20220412/event/123068>



Responsive Documents

from the School District

50 States. 50 Grants. 5000 Voices.
Application Questions

Application Notes

- All of the following questions are required unless otherwise stated.
 - Sections 1 through 3 should take about 30 minutes to complete.
 - Sections 4 through 7 should take about two hours to complete.
 - As a reminder, you can always save a draft of your application and return to it later. ●
- Your application will be graded by the following:
- School Environment - 15%
 - Project Vision - 50%
 - Project Budget - 15%
 - Overall Review - 20%
 - Priority Criteria - +10% BONUS
- All answers must include collaboration with student leadership and demonstrate how students will be involved. Students can be invited to work on the application as a collaborator. You can find more information in this article.

Eligibility Questions

1. Is your school located in the United States of America or one of its territories?
Yes.
2. Is your school a public or charter secondary (middle or high) school?
Public high school
3. Will this grant support LGBTQ+ students and educators at your school? Yes, Lgbtq+ students.
4. Will your grant project successfully include student/youth participation in the planning and execution of the proposed project? Yes, the GSA will be actively involved.
5. Do you have a project plan that can be executed within one school year?
6. Will this grant fund research, political activities, scholarships, or the needs of a single student (NOTE: These types of activities will NOT receive funding.)?


Application Questions

SCHOOL INFORMATION (Section 1 of 7)

1. Project Name
 - a. Gender Affirming closet at Rock Bridge High School, MO.
2. Upload a screenshot from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of your school information.

NOTE: The inclusion or exclusion of a school in this locator does NOT constitute an endorsement of the school and should NOT be used in any way to infer the accreditation status of the school.

School Directory Information [Search Results](#) [Modify Search](#) [Data Notes/Grant IDs](#) [Help](#)
 (2020-2021 school year)

School Name: ROCK BRIDGE SR. HIGH	NCES School ID: 290100000299	State School ID: MO-010093-1075010093				
District Name: Columbia 93 district information	NCES District ID: 2901000	State District ID: MO-010093				
Mailing Address: 4303 S PROVIDENCE RD COLUMBIA, MO 65203-7159	Physical Address:  4303 S PROVIDENCE RD COLUMBIA, MO 65203-7159	Phone: (573)214-3100				
Type: Regular school	Status: Open	Charter: No				
Supervisory Union #: N/A	Grade Span: (grades 9 - 12) <table border="1" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;">9</td> <td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;">10</td> <td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;">11</td> <td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;">12</td> </tr> </table>	9	10	11	12	
9	10	11	12			

School Details (2020-2021 school year)

County: Boone County schools in county	
Locale: City: Midsize (12)	Total Students: 1,971
Magnet: No	Classroom Teachers (FTE): 110.36
Title I School: No	Student/Teacher Ratio: 17.86
Title I School-Wide Program: †	

a. Locate your school at <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/>. School name, city, and state should be sufficient to find your school. Once the results show, please click on the link for your school. This will take you to a page that provides all of your school information, such as address, Title I status, and total school population.

3. School Name

IT GETS BETTER PROJECT. itgetsbetter.org

4. School State Missouri

5. School City Columbia

6. School Website <https://www.cpsk12.org/RBHS>

CONTACT INFORMATION (Section 2 of 7)

Below, please provide the name and contact information for the main faculty advisor and student leader directly overseeing the grant project.

1. Faculty Advisor Name James Meyer
2. Faculty Advisor Title EEE teacher
3. Faculty Advisor Email JMeyer@cpsk12.org
4. Student Leader Name [REDACTED]
5. Student Leader Email [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

GENDER AND SEXUALITIES ALLIANCE (GSA) OR SIMILAR CLUB INFORMATION (Section 3 of 7) In this section, we'd like to learn if your school has a Gender and Sexualities Alliance (GSA) or similar club, and if so, more information on the group. If your school does not currently have a GSA or similar club, don't worry. This will not penalize your application.

1. Does your school have a GSA or similar club?
 - a. Yes
 - i. Name of your GSA or similar club (if applicable) GSA
 - ii. How often does your GSA or similar club meet?
 1. Weekly
 2. Monthly
 3. Other
 - iii. Average Student Attendance per Meeting
15
 - iv. How many years has your GSA or similar club been active?
12+
 - v. Tell us about your GSA or similar club. Describe the history of your club, if you have a leadership structure, what your goals and objectives are, and previous activities and campaigns. (400 word limit)

Our GSA has been around for 12+ years and has the purpose of being a safe space for LGBTQ+ students and allies. This club is mainly student led and has several student leaders that are actively involved in projects throughout the school, one of which being a recent T-Shirt Drive with the purpose of donating money to the Trevor Project. The campaign earned a total of \$1,400! The entire project was completely run by students and this student contribution can be expected in our project as well. While the GSA has cycled through several faculty sponsors, the staff continue to be involved with the club even after their terms end.

In a typical meeting, the time is spent addressing a certain issue that is being faced by LGBTQ+ students within our school. Their most recent educational meeting was on various pronouns and when it is appropriate to use each. The meetings consist of presentations and student-driven conversations. While each meeting has a set issue that will be discussed, extra time is delegated for students to receive peer support and discuss experiences they would not feel comfortable talking about anywhere else.

The GSA also makes it their goal to extend their inclusivity towards other student organizations, such as the Rock Bridge High School Color Guard. Many students within the Color Guard have had difficult experiences coming out to their families and transitioning. They have expressed that they rely on the GSA to help cope with their emotions during the process. Many of them show up regularly to the meetings and contribute.

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT (Section 4 of 7)

If your school does not have a supportive administration or school environment, this will not be counted against you. The following questions will be used to understand your application.

1. What are the greatest challenges and needs of LGBTQ+ students at your school? (350 word limit)

Within our school, LGBTQ+ students face several issues when it comes to gender neutral bathrooms. There are a total of four gender neutral bathrooms in the entire school but none of

them are openly advertised to the student body, meaning that very few know about them. There have been multiple incidents of teachers being uninformed about the fact that students can use these "hidden" gender neutral bathrooms, leading to various reports of teachers prohibiting their students from using them. This creates an overall uncomfortable and sometimes hostile relationship between the LGBTQ+ student body and the Rock Bridge High School Administration. The bathrooms' locations also cause problems due to there being so few in such a large school, resulting in the bathrooms being quite far from various classes. There are multiple teachers who impose time limits on restroom breaks which is a restriction that LGBTQ+ students are often unable to meet if they have to travel across the school to reach the bathrooms. LGBTQ+ issues have garnered negative attention in the past, not only at Rock Bridge High School but throughout our entire school district, an example being one of our local middle schools. Students in their GSA put up educational posters about various sexualities and gender identities and this led to harsh criticism from parents of students who attended the school. At first, the GSA was pressured to take the posters down, but they were eventually able to put them back up with support from the administration. While this specific situation ended positively, it still contributed to preconceived prejudices against LGBTQ+ students. This isn't surprising to us due to the current political climate in Missouri.

All of these challenges are compounded by legislation throughout the state and the country that are criminalizing the exploration of gender identity and sexuality, the "Don't Say Gay" Bill being a prime example. The current political unrest surrounding LGBTQ+ rights within our country has had a negative impact on the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth. This further presents our need to be inclusive and supportive of queer students in our school.

2. How does your school currently address bullying and/or harassment, particularly of LGBTQ+ students? (350 word limit)

Our school district has a very strict anti-bullying policy. There is an anonymous form available for anyone (students, parents, and faculty) to fill out in order to report any bullying or harassment. Students at our school can also go to counselors to discuss any incidents or experiences, the counselors then filing the statement for them. Both the anonymous form and anything reported by counselors or teachers leads to an investigation being started. Within the investigation process, there are various procedures depending on the type of harassment reported and how it's classified. In our district, Gender identity harassment is filed under "protective classes," a category defined as issues and/or minorities that have historically been discriminated against.

3. Do you think your grant project will receive support from administrators at your school? Explain. (350 word limit)

Yes, absolutely. Rock Bridge has shown support for student led initiatives in the past, the GSA fundraiser for the Trevor Project being an example. When we first introduced this idea to our administration we received immediate encouragement, particularly from our outreach counselor, Leslie Thalhuber, and our principal, Jacob Sirna. We quickly arranged a meeting with them, our GSA student leaders and sponsors, and another counselor, Amelia Howser. In this meeting, we discussed all aspects of the project, all administrators offering support for our goals, extending their own ideas at times. Jacob Sirna is also helping us submit our project idea to the business office in order to get us approved to submit our application.

PROJECT VISION (Section 5 of 7)

IT GETS BETTER PROJECT.itgetsbetter.org

Up until now, you have been showing us how your school currently stands. Now is the opportunity to paint a vision for the future at your school.

1. UPLOAD A PDF: Describe the project you would accomplish with a grant from the It Gets Better Project. Please provide a project narrative, which must include a thorough breakdown of your proposed project, objectives you hope to achieve with this project grant, a timeline executable within one school year, and how your project justifies the need for this grant based on the challenges and needs of LGBTQ+ students at your school. (2 page limit)

- Create a new doc for this
- Describe the project, the idea itself as well as the existence of the PBX closet, its previous use in providing clothes, and our specific plans for it (maybe pictures?)
- Talk about how we became close and [REDACTED] and how that sparked the motivation for the project
- Timeline - idk about this one lol
- Talk about the current political climate in Missouri and how several queer students don't have support at home and need the closet
- Have a short bit talk about the kinda psychology behind it: students who can't transition and have gender dysphoria find it tough to concentrate and do well in school so providing them means to express their gender identity will help them with their mental health as well as their grades and academic success [REDACTED]

LINK TO DOC:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1GnM4B-\[REDACTED\]](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1GnM4B-[REDACTED])

2. How will you evaluate and measure the success of your project? What metrics will you be using? (350 word limit)

Every year Rock Bridge conducts the Student Culture Survey, which is a simple anonymous survey about our student body demographics as well as how each student views the environment within Rock Bridge. There are questions directly asking how safe students feel and how comfortable they feel expressing their gender and sexual identities. There are also questions addressing the comfort level that students have with the Rock Bridge faculty and how willing they are to share their concerns and experiences with them. Figures from our fall school culture survey revealed that 22.9% of LGBTQ+ students do not feel that the rules for behavior, language, and dress, are non-discriminatory, and 20.7% answered that these policies needed improvement. A concerningly large margin of LGBTQ+ identifying students (19%) responded "needs improvement" when asked if they felt that they were welcomed at school. A whopping 22.3% of LGBTQ+ students felt that disciplinary action isn't applied equitably, and nearly 30.2% of LGBTQ+ students did not believe that all students are spoken to in the same manner of respect or held to consistent standards of behavior. We plan on observing the results of this survey every year and seeing if the environment within Rock Bridge changes with the introduction of our closet.

Due to the fact that the closet was used for a different purpose, our administration did not collect any data pertaining to the number of students that were using it previously. After we establish the closet as a gender affirming resource, we will take an inventory of the items being checked out and keep track of the students who utilize the closet.

3. What challenges or barriers do you foresee for a successful execution of your project? How will you address the above challenges and barriers? Please explain thoroughly. (400 word limit)

Due to the nature of our project and the current political climate in Missouri, we are wary of pushback from local parents, especially reflecting on the events that occurred at the local middle school that was mentioned earlier. We are also being cautious with matters concerning how the district will react to the closet only being located in Rock Bridge High School. Within our district, a closet was established where students who were unable to purchase a prom dress could go and check out a dress for free. This closet is known as the Cinderella closet. However, the district decided to move the closet from a local high school to the official district administration building. This made it incredibly difficult for students to access the closet, seeing as many had transportation issues and a lack of parental support. The entire purpose of our gender-affirming closet is to safely provide transitioning clothes for students who normally would not be able to get them at home. Our closet potentially being moved to the district could make it inaccessible to students who do not have reliable transportation to it, lessening the positive impact it could have on the Rock Bridge LGBTQ+ student body.

Throughout the country, states are restricting LGBTQ+ rights, especially for queer youth. As of mid-march, five bills seeking to restrict trans-rights have been filed in the Missouri General Assembly. The bills are looking to strip doctors who perform gender-affirming care for minors of their medical licenses and to ban transgender athletes from playing sports with the teams of the gender they identify as. They have not been passed, but the political anti-trans movements currently occurring in Texas and Florida demonstrate that there is a likely chance that all five bills may go through, consequently opening up doors for more restrictions to be placed on gender-affirming care for minors, a category that our closet falls under.

4. How could your project incorporate broader community involvement, if any? (Optional) a. Please note that grants will be prioritized to project plans that incorporate broader community impact and involvement. Any community involvement must be school-based and student-focused. For example, projects can include establishing a partnership between LGBTQ+ students at your school and LGBTQ+ seniors in your area.

Our long-term goal for this project is to open these closets in each of the four high schools in our community. The lack of inclusivity and support for students who are transitioning isn't uncommon in Columbia, and we want to make sure that every high school student has access to resources that can help them feel confident and secure. By earning this grant, we can show our capability to see a project like this through and it will motivate the district to sponsor similar initiatives at the other high schools!

The largest resource for LGBTQ+ youth in our town is called The Center Project. This organization is heavily involved in the Mid-Missouri Pride Fest and they host a youth group on Thursday nights for students who are experiencing difficulties with finding their identity. Our classmate's mother is a board member for this organization and we are going to utilize her experiences with struggling LGBTQ+ youth in setting up our gender affirming closet.

and I truly believe that fashion is one of the most important forms of self-expression and this closet gives LGBTQ+ students the chance to experiment with whatever makes them feel the safest. We would like to provide some level of relatability to the students who are accessing this closet by showcasing some trans models within our community, wearing the clothes that we bought. This can help our LGBTQ+ peers feel more comfortable, knowing that there are people going through similar experiences that have emerged happier and in style. We plan to reach out to local modeling agencies and also to anyone who is interested in modeling our clothes, because there are so many people in our community working at businesses and schools who are confident within their gender identity and could potentially help empower and uplift queer students struggling to find confidence in themselves. Another major aspect of our gender affirming closet is makeup, and we have several cosmetics stores within our community (like Ulta and Sephora) who can potentially provide classes and tutorials using the money from this grant.

BUDGET (Section 6 of 7)

1. UPLOAD A PDF: Provide an estimated budget for your project.
 - a. List any estimated professional services, materials, or other costs anticipated with your project. An example budget can be found at the end of this PDF.

Closet Items	Projected Expenses
Clothing (sweaters, hoodies, athletic and non-athletic t-shirts, shorts, skirts, jeans, polos, dresses, tuxedos, suits, coats, jackets, etc.)	\$4,000
Shoes and Accessory Clothing (flip-flops, high heels, sandals, baseball hats, boots, scarves, winter hats, gloves, sunglasses, ties, belts, jewelry, etc.)	\$2,500
Inner Wear (binders, bras, underwear, socks, etc.)	\$1,500
Furnishings (a new sign, black curtains, a floor length mirror, a rainbow rug, paint for decorative artwork, fairy lights for overhead pipes within the closet, clothing hangers, shoe rack, bags and jewelry stand, etc.)	\$1,000
Makeup (brushes, sponges, and applicators, foundations/concealer shades, eyeshadow pallets, eyeliners, blush, lipsticks, etc.)	\$500
Inventory and Bookkeeping Materials (scannable barcodes and printable tags)	\$500

Total \$10,000

2. Does any of your school's funding currently go towards supporting LGBTQ+ students specifically? Yes
 - a. If yes → Please describe how funding is currently supporting LGBTQ+ students at your school. (350 word limit)

Our school's GSA sponsor is currently the manager for any funds that the organization earns through fundraising. The t-shirt campaign that we mentioned earlier earned

\$1,400 and all of that went towards the GSA club's account. This money is sure to be used for any of their future projects. At the end of the year, the GSA is allowed to request a small amount of money to be used for their next year's budget (as a club) but our school doesn't necessarily allocate any specific funding towards LGBTQ+ students.

3. If you were to receive this grant, what is the process for receiving and spending the funds? (350 words)

a. For example, some schools require that the funds go to a school and/or district bank account, while others allow for funds to be sent to a nonprofit fiscal sponsor (some schools refer to this as a booster organization).

The funds for this grant will be housed within our district's Business Services office. We will need to send a copy of the grant to them so that they can set up account codes and a report writer for the operation of the grant. Every month, the report writer will review the expenditures with us. After our grant period ends, the report writer will help us prepare a final expenditure report and we will submit this to you after approving it by the Business Services office. The line of communication between us and the office is Mr. Cherrington, reachable at jcherrington@cpsk12.org. He and the senior accountant, Brian Benter, CPA, reachable at bbenter@cpsk12.org, will help us withdraw funds for our closet purchases.

CONCLUSION (Section 7 of 7)

1. UPLOAD A VIDEO: Why would your school and this project make you the best recipient for this grant? While we'd love to see educators involved, this video is really the chance for your student leaders to shine. (3 minute limit)

a. You can include clips that show us the personality of your school, what you hope to achieve, people involved in your club, or showcase a few students and their passions.

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Example Budget

Below is an example of a budget to accompany your project plan. A budget is required for your application. List any estimated professional services, materials, or other costs anticipated with your project.

We understand this might be the first formal budget many of you may be creating, so it does not have to be perfect. We are not as much looking at a dollar-per-dollar breakdown, but more of a demonstration that you understand how to spend and access these funds effectively.

Proposed Budgetary Breakdown

Requested Grant Amount: \$9,000

Project: Gender Affirming Closet at It Gets Better High, CA

Expense	Amount
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Clothes & Shoes in Variety of Sizes	\$3,000
Makeup (incl. Disposable Containers, Applicators, Foundation, Eyeshadow, etc.)	\$1,500
Accessories (incl. Binders, Jewelry, Bags, etc).	\$1,500
Clothes Racks, Hangers, & Storage Containers for Clothes & Supplies	\$1,000
Launch Party Event (incl. Food, Paper Goods, etc).	\$500
Social Media & Flyer Graphic Design	\$500
Educator Professional Development on Gender Identity	\$1,000

TOTAL \$9,000

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Rock Bridge High School
Columbia, MO, USA
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Coming Out of the Closet In Style.

As my friend [REDACTED] was scrolling through Instagram one night, she stumbled upon an advertisement from your organization, the \$10,000 catching her eye. The next day in one of our shared classes, she explained the whole project to me, knowing I would be interested. [REDACTED] and both [REDACTED] and I are very passionate about LGBTQ+ rights, spending countless hours of class time discussing my experiences and issues that we see throughout the world. One of the classes that we share is called Advanced Seminars & Investigations, taught by James Meyer. The premise of the class is to find a project that we are passionate about and that could result in a lasting positive impact in some way. The It Gets Better Project fit perfectly, so [REDACTED] and I agreed to team up and take on the grant project. We spent several days brainstorming various ideas, combining my personal experiences with things from [REDACTED] perspective. [REDACTED] then attended a GSA meeting at our school and after observing the experiences and concerns expressed by the club members, we eventually settled on establishing a gender-affirming closet. [REDACTED] and I discussed that we wanted the closet to be a safe and comfortable space for students. We also discussed how we would inform all teachers about it, as well as the GSA so that knowledge of the closet could be passed on throughout the student body and reach anyone who needs it. Our end goal is to have it be largely student-run and manned by the GSA student leaders.

Both [REDACTED] and I have trans friends who unfortunately have not received support from home and are unable to have access to gender-affirming fashion, and I personally can understand how expensive it can be to revamp your whole wardrobe and buy things such as binders and chest tape. We decided that the gender-affirming closet we wanted to found would have plenty of binders in all shapes in colors, a variety of more masculine and more feminine clothes, including coats and jackets, an array of dress wear such as dresses and tuxedos for school dances and fine arts performances, along with a large selection of shoes (high heels, sandals, boots, tennis shoes, etc.), underwear, athletic wear, and then a collection of makeup that students could use. Once we had created this fairly basic list, [REDACTED] and I went to our Rock Bridge outreach counselor, Leslie Thalhuber, and explained our whole project idea to her. She then told us about the PBX closet. This was an already existing closet within our school basement that was filled with clothes for students in desperate need. She described how students who needed clothes after a family accident or private incident could go down there and pick out something to wear until they could be given access to a Rock Bridge High School care fund. While the idea of the closet was amazing and both [REDACTED] and I were thankful it existed for students and realized that we could turn it into a gender-affirming closet while also keeping its original purpose in helping students in need, it unfortunately wasn't maintained. When Ms. Thalhuber showed it to us, there were piles of dirty clothes on the floor, unorganized heaps on the shelves, a shoe rack on the verge of collapsing, and nests of wires and electrical boxes lining the walls.

While unattractive, [redacted] and I knew that we could reorganize it and potentially, with the grant money, be able to revamp it. We spent several class days downstairs in the closet, picking up clothes, sorting them into piles of laundry and boxing duplicates of Rock Bridge Merchandise that we knew we could donate. After three days, the closet looked like this:



[redacted] in the closet after we cleaned it up.)

While organizing the closet, [redacted] and I came up with a list of things that we wanted added to make the space more inviting, creating a budget alongside it, planning out how we would meet our goals if we received the grant money.

We also created a timeline going hand in hand with our budget plan, factoring in our summer availability and time we could spend working on it before the school year. By September 1st, 2022, we will have all clothes purchased for the closet. By November 1st, 2022, the closet will be furnished with curtains, a rug, lights, a mirror, etc. By February 1st, 2023, all clothes will be tagged, inventoried, and racked and sorted, the closet organization itself being ready for use. By March 1st, 2023, a system for checking out clothing will be established and student leaders and staff will be appointed to maintain and oversee the closet use. All of Rock Bridge faculty will also be informed about the closet and how they can direct students towards it. By March 15th, 2023, the closet will be up and running and the rest of the school year will be spent taking inventory and collecting data on how successful the project is.

While the student body is very supportive of itself and organizations such as GSA work hard to help queer students, the administration doesn't meet all the needs of transgender students (the lack of gender neutral bathrooms being an example) and we hope that the gender-affirming closet will help encourage not only Rock Bridge, but our entire district into taking more initiative in supporting our LGBTQ+ student body.