

Bathroom Signs at Ruffing Montessori School

Bridget Rotman, *Equity and Justice Committee Chair*

During the spring of 2018, members of Ruffing's Equity and Justice Committee decided to take on a special project: the redesign of outdated bathroom signs throughout the school that featured images of a "traditional girl" wearing a dress with a ponytail, and a "traditional boy" wearing pants and having short hair. After gaining the support of the Head of School and Director of Finance and Operations, we formed a sub-committee comprised of faculty members and Middle School students who were invested in this work. We had heard from some Middle School students that it would be appropriate to have an "everyone" bathroom in their space. Additionally, there were students in our elementary program who had shown interest in using an "everyone" bathroom.

The Committee's first meeting included a video chat with consultant Jennifer Bryan. We have worked with Jennifer in the past to support our school's awareness and ability to engage topics of gender and sexuality diversity. We felt Jennifer would be a great resource to help guide our initial steps on this process. She encouraged us to "start where we are" and to move in a direction that "feels right for our community." Jennifer gave us field work and suggested we pay attention to bathroom signs in restaurants and businesses around town. Our committee met a number of times to brainstorm the type of signs we envisioned and wanted to create. After much dialogue and sharing of ideas, we agreed on the combined use of images *and* words for our new signs. Visual images reflect what can be found in each bathroom (a toilet, a urinal, a changing station, etc.), and words help support these images (boys, girls, everyone, family). To add dimension to the wording, each sign reflects the languages we teach at Ruffing (English, Spanish, French and Latin), plus Italian to honor our Montessori foundation.

No structural changes were made to any of our bathrooms. We simply changed the signs on the doors. In the Middle School, we designated what was originally a single bathroom for faculty into an "everyone" bathroom. In the school's Elementary wing, we changed what was an adult bathroom into a "family" bathroom, which is now available to anyone who needs to use it. We are so proud of this progressive, group effort which was initiated and completed by Ruffing faculty and students.

"At the beginning of the year, I decided to put "discuss bathroom signs" on our community meeting agenda, remembering that we had discussed the issue the year before. The next Friday we began a discussion lasting for an hour+ and was VERY productive. At the end of the meeting we decided that we needed a gender neutral bathroom that would be available for all. We also felt that the signs were outdated because they were portraying stereotypical male and female characteristics. We felt it was necessary to include these changes to further make the middle school community a more inclusive and safer environment." ~ Hudson Lytle, 7th Year Student, Ruffing Montessori School