



The Growing Need for Single-Use Restrooms

A Guide for School Leaders, Parents and Community Members Advocating for Affirming Schools

Student safety and well-being should be a top priority for all youth-serving professionals. Unfortunately, the standard multi-stall restroom has become unsafe for many students and doesn't meet the needs of all students. According to a [2021 study on school crime and safety by the Institute of Education Sciences](#), 2.4% of students ages 12-18 reported being afraid of harm in any school restroom. For LGBTQ+ students, the fear of school restrooms is much higher with [32.8% of transgender and gender-expansive youth and 26.1% of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth](#) reporting feeling unsafe in school restrooms. Standard multi-stall restrooms make it difficult for school staff to appropriately monitor student behavior, leading to fights and assaults in school restrooms.

And it is not just fights that students and educators are concerned about regarding restrooms. According to the [2023 Verkada Teen Vaping Survey](#), the overwhelming majority of students noted that multi-stall restrooms were the “#1 hotspot” for vaping on campus. That same study noted that a third of teens avoided going into a multi-stall restroom at school because of the vaping epidemic.

Single-use restrooms provide **more privacy for all students** and reduce some of the safety concerns, such as fighting and unwanted contact with vaping in standard multi-stall restrooms. Single-use restrooms offer **privacy and safety for students with disabilities**, students with religious or faith backgrounds that require additional privacy, and safety for LGBTQ+ students.

Single-use restrooms can also allow educators to monitor restroom use more appropriately without having to stand in a multi-stall restroom. This includes good classroom management skills like monitoring how long a student is away from the classroom and ensuring all locked doors are accessible to an adult staff member in emergency situations. Additionally, your school or organization should have a policy in place for how to enter a locked restroom in emergencies.

While financial cost makes it challenging for schools and organizations to change all of their current restrooms to single-use, increasing the availability and accessibility of single-use restrooms can help.



HERE ARE SEVEN STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER IN YOUR SCHOOL OR ORGANIZATION:

Take Inventory

1

Take an inventory of all restrooms in your school or organization. In schools, there are often single-use facilities for teachers, or in the nurse's office, or even at the front office for visitors. Take note of where all the single-use restrooms are located, including if they are currently available to students. Also, note if they are accessible for people with disabilities and meet ADA requirements. Depending on the size of your campus or building, ideally, there would be several single-use restrooms available. For example, if you have a building with several floors, ideally, there would be a single-use restroom on each floor.

Restore Restrooms Not Currently In Use

2

In addition to taking inventory of your current restrooms, look at your buildings' blueprints for rooms with plumbing access. Often these janitor closets or storage rooms were bathrooms and could easily be retrofitted and reopened as single-use restrooms for youth to use. While this step has a cost, it is likely significantly less expensive than retrofitting all restrooms in your building.

Consult State and Municipal Laws

3

Before making any changes to signage or updating restrooms, be sure to consult your local municipal codes as well as state laws related to restrooms. For example, in the city of Portland, OR, any city-controlled building with a single-use restroom must be open to all genders and must use the term "restroom." Similarly, in the state of California, any single-use restroom must be made available for all genders and cannot be designated male or female.

Update Existing Restrooms

4

Where possible, update current single-use restrooms to meet the needs of more students. This could include simply updating the signage for the restroom or could be more involved, such as ensuring the restroom is ADA-compliant.

Signage

5

There are numerous reasons why someone would need to use a private restroom that is not related to a person's gender. For this reason, we recommend using the term single-use restroom. It is recommended to avoid using gender-specific signage, as anyone should be able to use these restrooms.

Remove Barriers to Youth Access

6

Ensure that single-use restrooms are made readily available to any student who wants more privacy for any reason. This can include allowing students more time when using restrooms far away from their classrooms, updating staff-only restrooms to open to anyone, and ensuring single-use restrooms within other offices, such as the nurse's office, are available to students during school hours. This should also include not requiring special permission or a special key to use a single-use restroom and any student should be able to access this option without providing a reason.

Commit to Future Investments in Single-Use Restrooms

7

Making significant changes to current restrooms can be costly, so it is understandable that many schools and organizations are unable to dramatically alter their current restrooms. However, schools and organizations can commit to ensuring future construction includes more single-use restrooms that meet the needs of many different types of students.