

Frequently asked questions for parents/guardians: Guidelines for best practices for 2SLGBTQ+ students, parents/guardians and staff

Introduction

At the Calgary Board of Education, we work together every day to create welcoming, safe, caring and respectful school communities where each and every student feels a sense of belonging.

Students, staff and school communities share the responsibility for cultivating environments that welcome everyone and provide opportunities to thrive in life and learning. This includes ensuring we create safe, caring environments for people with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. This responsibility is reflected in CBE [Mission](#) and [Results](#) policies, and [CBE Education Plan](#).

School boards exist within a broader context of laws and public policies that protect and defend human rights. Section 33(2) of *Education Act* mandates all Boards to create policies that address how boards will provide a welcoming, caring, safe and respectful learning environment that promotes diversity and fosters a sense of belonging. Additionally, [The Education Act](#), the [ATA Professional Code of Conduct](#), [the Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities for Teachers](#), the [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#), [the Criminal Code of Canada](#) and the [Alberta Human Rights Act](#) all serve as important policies and legislation that reflect the need for Alberta school board employees to act in ways that are inclusive and respectful of students, their families and school personnel with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions. These laws and public policies are critical in guiding our work and ensuring that we attend to the rights of all of our students, families and staff members.

Guidelines for Best Practices

What are the Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Gender Expressions?

Creating the conditions for each student to thrive is critical to fulfilling our purpose. This means that every day, we are working together to create safe, caring and respectful school communities, where each and every student feels a sense of belonging and experiences success in learning. The [Creating Conditions to Thrive](#) document is intended to support best practices and decision making related to sexual and gender diverse students. The intention of this work is to support members in the CBE community in our shared obligation to attend to the equality and dignity of all individuals inclusive of their gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation.

Why are there special guidelines for this one particular group?

Sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression are protected rights under the Alberta Human Rights Act

The [Creating Conditions to Thrive](#) document was created to enhance the safety of and learning conditions for 2SLGBTQ+ students. This is a vulnerable group that is often marginalized in our society.

Those who self-identify as 2SLGBTQ+ (particularly transgender individuals) typically experience much higher rates of harassment, discrimination, assaults, suicide rates, homelessness, poor health outcomes, and so on.

While many individuals identify as 2SLGBTQ+, approximately only 0.3% of the population identify as transgender or gender non-conforming. This is a relatively small group, but one that requires and deserves support and protection.

Privacy/Confidentiality

What information will be shared when a student makes a disclosure?

Our school staff are always encouraged to be in open communication with parents/guardians about the learning and well-being of their children. We believe that learning and development is enhanced by parents/guardians and school staff communicating and working together.

Students are entitled to the protection of their personal information, including their gender identity and sexual orientation. Some 2SLGBTQ+ students are not open about this part of their identity. Given the sensitivity related to one's gender identity and sexual orientation, if a student discloses that they are 2SLGBTQ+ to a CBE staff member, that information will be held in confidence and not shared without the students' permission.

By far, the majority of CBE students who have made a disclosure related to 2SLGBTQ+ status to school staff have already had conversations with their parents/guardians. Most students, particularly if they are seeking accommodations, are approaching the school with their families to have these conversations.

Name and Pronoun Usage

What names can students use?

Honouring student requests regarding their chosen name is an important part of helping them feel supported and accepted. Typically, students and their parents/guardians approach school staff to discuss the student's gender identity and to request an Also Known As (AKA) name change. Entering this name into our computer system results in the preferred name being used on most school documentation.

The legal name cannot be changed in the Official Student Record unless the parent/guardian legally changes their child's name with Alberta Vital Statistics. Legal names will be visible on report cards and other legal documentation.

Washrooms and Change Rooms

Which students will have access to which washrooms and change rooms?

Transgender students can access the washroom and change room that corresponds with their gender identity. However, the decision to do so takes place in the context of a very thoughtful and thorough process that includes meetings with the school staff, parents/guardians, the student and usually a consultant from our system.

It is important to note that we have not had any instances of students "faking" a different gender identity in an attempt to access washrooms or change rooms with ill intentions. Our experience, and the experiences of other school boards, has shown that students simply do not do this. It is the transgender individuals who are most at risk of harassment or harm when utilizing either the boys' or girls' washrooms.

Additionally, when offered an option, many transgender students choose to access an individual washroom to use the facilities and to change for physical education classes.

What about adult access to washrooms?

All adults in schools are asked to use the adult washrooms, not student washrooms. Parents/guardians, staff and other adults in our schools can access the individual adult washrooms of adult washrooms that correspond with their gender identity.

Overnight Trips

How are overnight trips handled?

The CBE provides a variety of opportunities for overnight trips for students (e.g., outdoor school camps, band trips, cultural traveling experiences, etc.). The overnight accommodations for these trips vary greatly (e.g., dorms, hotel rooms, camps, etc.). When a transgender or gender non-conforming student is participating in an overnight trip, consideration is given to the safety and privacy of all students involved. There is no “one way” in which students are accommodated. Many factors are considered including the needs and wishes of the student and their guardians, the facilities where students will be sleeping, the supervision provided, etc.

Access to Physical Education and Sports

How will access to physical education and sports be handled?

Students are currently permitted to participate in sex-segregated recreational or competitive athletic activities in accordance with their self-declared gender identity. This is fully supported by the [Alberta Schools' Athletic Association in their 2022-2023 Policy Handbook](#).

As noted previously, changing one's gender identity at school is a thorough process. Transgender and gender non-conforming students and their parents/guardians are typically involved in conversations with school staff about access to physical education classes and sports teams. Very careful consideration is given to what team the student plays on, and what information is shared with the coach, other team members, etc. This is a thoughtful process. A male student cannot simply “declare” he is female and sign up for a girls' sports team, and vice versa.

Student Attire

What impact do these guidelines have on student attire?

Students are currently free to express themselves in a manner that reflects their gender identity, personal taste and comfort. Expectations related to student dress will not be gender specific (e.g., girls must wear skirts for a formal performance while boys are allowed to wear dress pants). All students are still expected to maintain standards related to appropriate attire (e.g., no offensive words or visuals on clothing, clothing that appropriately covers the body, etc.).

Use of Gender Specific Terms

Can we still use “mother/father” and gender specific pronouns?

Yes. We can still use the words “mother” or “father” or refer to people using the pronouns he/him and she/her. The guidelines suggest that staff be thoughtful when using terms like mother and father. For example, instead of saying to a class, “Boys and girls please take your pictures home to your mom and dad”, teachers can say, “Everyone please take your pictures home to your family” or “Everyone please take your pictures home to your parents or guardians”. This is inclusive language that reflects the diversity of family life we know our students to have. For example, many of our students live with grandparents, other family members, have foster parents, etc.

Likewise, if a person identifies as male or female, we will still use he/him and she/her pronouns.

Here are links to supporting information on our website:

- [Creating Inclusive Environments](#)
- [Creating Safe and Caring Environments for all 2SLGBTQ+ Youth](#)
- [Creating Conditions to Thrive](#)

*2SLGBTQ+ (Two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning) is meant to be an all-encompassing term that includes all gender and sexual minorities or those who are questioning. Terms and definitions are ever changing, and we use this term as an inclusionary term for all.