

Creating the Conditions to Thrive



diversity



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Guidelines for Attending to Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sexual Orientation in our Schools

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Calgary Board
of Education

Guidelines for Attending to Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sexual Orientation in our Schools

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Introduction

Schools in the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) have the shared responsibility to cultivate environments that are welcoming, safe, caring and respectful for all. It is important to affirm and celebrate all students and to provide them with opportunities to thrive in life and learning. The [Mission](#) for the CBE is the foundation on which our work rests:

Each student, in keeping with his or her individual abilities and gifts, will complete high school with a foundation of learning necessary to thrive in life, work and continued learning.

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. There is a wide range of diversity with our students, employees, and families. Our Board of Trustees has defined diversity as "the full range of uniqueness within humanity." Fostering an inclusive school community that recognizes the full range of uniqueness of our students is central to our work. All individuals in our system have the right to be open about who they are, including expressing their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression without fear of unwanted consequences. These guidelines are intended to address the unique needs of gender and sexual minority students.

School boards exist within a broader context of laws and public policies that protect and defend human rights. [The Alberta Education Act](#), [Alberta School 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 (see Appendix A). 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.

Purpose and application of guidelines

These guidelines are intended to assist schools in creating welcoming, safe, caring and respectful environments for all students, families and school staff. Although there are many aspects in these guidelines that influence all three of these groups, the primary focus of these guidelines is to address the ways in which we might best support students.

Decisions related to supporting students should be made on a case-by-case basis. Each student's needs and concerns are considered individually and therefore each request is treated on a case-by-case basis. Not all requests are accommodated in the same way as there are many factors that contribute to the collaborative decision making process. When the unique needs of individual students are considered, it is possible to provide accommodations through a process that is respectful and affirming.

The guidelines set out in this document are intended to support best practices and decision making related to sexual and gender minority 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.

System supports

As a system we are committed to providing employees with the information, resources and learning opportunities needed to help gender and sexual minority students thrive. Communicating effectively with students, families, staff and community members about this work is also a priority.

There is a multi-disciplinary team at the system level to assist schools in supporting gender and sexual minority students and their families.

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Terms and definitions

Gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation are influenced by multiple personal, cultural, political, social and economic factors. Terms and definitions related to these concepts are constantly changing and evolving. There are many different terms in use because individuals think about and experience their gender and sexual orientation in many different ways. What follows is a list of common terms and definitions. However, it is in no way an exhaustive list and individuals may use a term that is not included here or may use one of these terms in a somewhat different way.

Ally

A person, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, who supports and stands up for the human and civil rights of sexual and gender minority individuals.

Asexual

A person who is not interested in, or does not desire sexual activity, either within or outside of a relationship.

Binary

An individual whose gender identity is either male or female. Individuals who identify as non-binary identify as neither fully male nor female and may identify as both, neither, a third gender, a fluid gender or something else.

Bisexual

An individual who has romantic attraction and sexual attraction toward both males and females.

Cisgender

A term for people whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.

Consistently Asserted Gender

The gender identity most consistently demonstrated (e.g., this includes things like the name a person chooses, the pronouns they use, the ways in which they dress and act, etc.).

Gender Diverse/Gender Variant

An umbrella term for individuals whose gender identity is different from their assigned sex at birth.

Gender Dysphoria

Emotional discomfort due to internal conflicts between one's gender identity and one's assigned sex at birth.

Gender Identity

A personal, deeply - felt sense of being male, female, both, neither or something else. Everyone has a gender identity.

Gender Expression

How a person expresses their gender through outward presentation and behaviour (e.g., a person's name, clothing, hair style, body language, mannerisms, etc.).

Gender Fluid

A person who at any time identifies as male, female, neutral or any other non-binary identity or some combination of identities. Their gender identity can vary at random or in response to different circumstances (other terms include *multi-gender*, *non-binary*, *transgender*).

Gender Non-Conforming

A person whose behaviours or gender expression falls outside of what is generally considered typical for their assigned sex at birth.

Gender Queer

An umbrella term for those identifying with a gender that is not traditionally male or female.

Heterosexism

The assumption that everyone is heterosexual and that this is the preferred way of being. Heterosexism is often expressed in subtle forms that go unnoticed by many or unchallenged (e.g., on forms asking for the mother and father's names rather than Parent/Guardian #1 and Parent/Guardian #2).

Heterosexual

A person who is emotionally, sexually and physically attracted to someone of the opposite sex. Commonly referred to as “straight”.

Homophobia

Fear and/or hatred of homosexuality, often exhibited by prejudice, discrimination, bullying and/or acts of violence.

Homosexual

A person who is emotionally, sexually and physically attracted to someone of the same sex. Commonly referred to as “gay” or “lesbian”.

Intersex

A person born with both male and female sex characteristics (e.g., chromosomes, hormones and/or physical anatomy).

Natal Sex

The sex a person is assigned at birth.

Pansexual

A person who is emotionally, sexually and physically attracted to someone irrespective of their sex, gender identity or gender expression. Many refer to themselves as “gender blind”.

Sexual Orientation

A person’s romantic or sexual attraction to a specific gender or genders (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, straight, pansexual). Sexual orientation and gender identity are separate, distinct parts of one’s identity (e.g., one can be transgender and identify as gay, straight, bisexual, etc.)

Transgender or Trans

A person whose gender identity is different from the assigned sex at birth. This is often used as an umbrella term for individuals whose gender identity or gender expression does not fit into conventional expectations for males and females. We use the term transgender as an expansive and inclusive term in these guidelines to represent a wide range of gender identities and expressions.

Transition

The process through which transgender people begin to live as the gender with which they identify rather than the sex assigned at birth. Social transition may include name and pronoun changes, hairstyles, clothing, behaviours/mannerisms, etc. Medical transition may include hormone suppressants to delay puberty, hormone replacement therapy to develop secondary sex characteristics consistent with the individuals' gender identity, and surgery. Each individual's transition is deeply personal and unique.

Transphobia

Fear or hatred of, or violence, harassment or discrimination perpetrated against transgender people.

Two-spirit

Some Aboriginal people identify themselves as two-spirited rather than as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.



Gender diversity overview

When people are born they are typically assigned a sex of either male or female based on their genitals. Biologically, however, there is actually a fair amount of sex variation in the general population. Some people have sex variations that include chromosomal, hormonal or physiological characteristics that are comprised of both male and female categories (referred to as intersex people). As such, not all people are exclusively categorized as male or female due to variations in chromosomes, hormones and physical anatomy.

Furthermore, people's gender identity does not always align with the sex they were assigned at birth. Gender identity is a personal, deeply felt sense of being male, female, both, neither or something else. Everyone has a gender identity. Gender identity can also be fluid rather than static and change over time for some people.

Of our transgender and gender non-conforming students we have many who were assigned one sex at birth yet identify with the opposite gender (assigned male at birth, but identify as female). We also have students who identify as both genders, neither gender, or who experience a fluid and fluctuating gender – often referred to as non-binary identities. All of these are valid identities and non-binary identities are no less “real” than male or female gender identities.

Gender identity begins to develop during the preschool years. Most children identify with the sex assigned to them at birth. Some young children, however, do not fully identify with the sex assigned at birth and experiment with cross gender or mixed gender dress, play, roles, etc. Although most children who experiment in these ways do not identify as transgender later in life, some do. Also, some may later identify as non-heterosexual, but not transgender. Some children *act* or *behave* like the opposite gender and others express that they want to *be* the opposite gender. These latter children are sometimes insistent, consistent and persistent in their statements about this and these are the children who are more likely to maintain a gender identity different from the sex assigned at birth as adults. Compared to children, adolescents who express a gender identity that is different from their sex assigned at birth nearly always identify as transgender or gender non-conforming throughout their lives.

Evidence-based best practice tells us that allowing children to take the lead with their gender identity and supporting them with this exploration is helpful. We help children when we give them room and freedom to explore free of judgement. In short, it is best to give children room to express their gender in ways that feel natural to them and to not “box” them in and hold them to any particular gender rules. It is also important to honour the gender identities that adolescents share with us as they are very likely to reflect their true and longstanding identity.

Privacy and confidentiality

Our school staff members 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.

Some transgender and gender non-conforming students are not open about their gender identity at school, at home or in the community for a variety of reasons. Similarly, many students are not open about their sexual orientation. Given the sensitivity related to one's gender identity and sexual orientation, should a student disclose that they are a sexual or gender minority to a CBE staff member, the information should be held in confidence. Unless a student provides permission to share this information, the staff member should not disclose this information to anyone else, including other staff members and parents/guardians.

By far the majority of CBE students who have made a disclosure to staff related to gender identity or sexual orientation have already had conversations with their parents/guardians. Most students, particularly if they are seeking accommodations such as name/pronoun changes, approach the school *with* their families to have these conversations.

When school staff members contact the parent/guardians of a transgender or gender non-conforming student, whenever possible, the student should first be consulted, in private, about how they would like the school staff member to refer to them (name and pronouns).

If a school has questions related to confidentiality or requires consultation regarding a particular student and their family please contact the system support team for assistance (see System Supports section).

Accommodating gender and sexual minority students

There are several different types of accommodations that can be made for gender and sexual minority students including name and pronoun usage, gender identification, access to washrooms, participation on sports teams, etc. How a student identifies (gender, name, pronouns) and how they would like to be supported at school is unique to each student. Conversations with the student and the student's parents/guardians are a critical part of the process in determining what the student and family desire and how the school might best address the student's needs.

Self-identification is the sole measure of an individual's sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Students or parents/guardians should not be asked to produce notes from psychologists or medical professionals or any other documents.

Each student's needs and concerns are considered individually and, therefore, each request is treated on a case-by-case basis. Not all requests are accommodated in the same way. There are many factors that contribute to making the best decisions and accommodations for a student. If you require assistance please contact the system supports identified in the Systems Supports section.

The following sections outline many of the common accommodation requests and how schools might best support students and their families.

Initial conversations and collaborative decision making

When a student or family member shares information about a particular student's gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation, it is imperative students and families feel respected, heard and supported. An open and supportive conversation is the first step. See Appendix B for examples of guiding questions to support these conversations.

During the initial conversations with students or parents/guardians it is important to recognize that school staff do not need to have all the answers or information to create an immediate and extensive support plan. The initial goals are to understand the experience of the student and their expressed hopes and needs. It may be helpful to let students and families know that you may be seeking support from other system professionals to help determine the best support plan and accommodations for the student. The immediate needs of the student should be determined and addressed (e.g., access to a safe and comfortable washroom) followed by additional supports and accommodations. The needs of staff (e.g., professional learning opportunities) are another consideration. It is critical that accommodations and support plans are created in collaboration with students.

It is very common for gender and sexual minority students to keep their gender identity and sexual orientation private for long periods of time prior to sharing with family, friends and school personnel. It is also common for students to share information with one person or a very small group of people initially and to eventually share with others. This timeframe can be either fairly condensed or very lengthy. The process is different for each individual and is based on many unique factors. As such, a student may be thought of, and be referred to, as male or female in a school for years while having an internal sense of having a different gender identity. While a disclosure about gender identity or sexual orientation may seem new to staff, it is likely that the student has known about this aspect of their identity for a long time.

There is a difference between students sharing information and decisions being made about a student's learning. When it comes to decision making about students' learning, parents/guardians are active participants and the CBE respects the right for parents to make decisions. Our school staff members are always

encouraged to work collaboratively with parents/guardians about the learning and well-being of their children. When the student's wishes, and the wishes of their parent/guardian conflict, please contact the system support team for support and consultation.

During the collaborative process, no student or family should ever be referred to a program or service provider that purports to "fix", "change" or "repair" a student's sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. The CBE acknowledges and values diversity with regard to gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation and recognizes that it is unethical to attempt to change these aspects of one's identity. There may be times when students are referred to CBE or external supports and services as needed (e.g., individual or family mental health supports that do not purport to change an individual's gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation).

Name changes

Honouring student requests regarding preferred name and pronouns is an important part of them feeling supported and accepted. Students may ask to be addressed by their chosen name and to choose pronouns that align with their gender identity and/or gender expression. A student does not have to obtain legal documentation of a name change or gender marker change (e.g., birth certificate) to be addressed by a chosen name or pronouns.

There are three primary ways in which a student's name requests may be accommodated.

1. A student may request the everyday use of a chosen or preferred name. This includes school staff referring to a student by their chosen name. This does not include making any changes in the Student Information System (SIS) – it is simply the casual day-to-day use of a chosen name. When a student makes this request they should be made aware that their legal name will continue to be displayed on class lists, report cards and other documents. This request is often made by students alone and parental permission is not typically required. However, if a student and their parents/guardians have differences of opinion about use of a chosen name the system support team can be accessed for consultation.
2. A student may request that an Also Known As (AKA) name is entered into SIS. Typically this involves parental knowledge and permission. School staff should always use an AKA name when addressing students, writing their names, discussing the student and so on. Additionally, once the AKA name is entered into SIS it will be reflected on most school documents (e.g., student ID cards, class lists, etc.). However, some SIS reports automatically draw legal names, rather than AKA names, so it is important

that schools review these reports to ensure students' legal names are not disclosed (e.g., verify class lists for substitute teachers, Individual Program Plans, etc.).

Disclosure of a student's legal name may have serious and significant consequences for a student and may "out" the student as transgender or gender non-conforming. Report cards can and should be printed using the AKA name. If support is needed in doing so, please contact the SIS team. Students should be advised that a legal name change is required if they want their official Alberta Education documents to reflect their chosen name (e.g., transcripts, provincial assessments, diplomas, etc.). Adding an AKA name does not change a student's legal name on their Official Student Record. Generally, parental permission is required to enter an AKA name in SIS. If a student wishes to do this without parental permission please consult with the system support team.

3. A student can also legally change their name. In order to change one's legal name individuals must follow the process as outlined by Alberta Vital Statistics. For students under the age of 18 this requires written parental permission. If the parents/guardians provide the school with documentation from Alberta Vital Statistics of a legal name change then the school can change the legal name in the Official Student Record. The documentation from Alberta Vital Statistics should be kept in the Official Student Record. When a legal name change occurs the student's new legal name will be reflected on all school documents, classroom materials, school ID cards, etc.

Pronouns

Students should be consulted, in private, regarding pronouns and gender identification. Do not assume that a student wants to use he/him or she/her. Some students may want to use *gender-specific* pronouns (she/her and he/him) and others may want to use *gender-neutral* pronouns (e.g., they/them, zie/hir, etc.). Gender-neutral pronouns have been in use for many years and are very familiar to many of our students, families and staff. Students may also wish to express or identify themselves in others ways (e.g., Mx. instead of Mr., Mrs., Ms., or Miss or no prefix at all).

Calling a student by the incorrect pronoun is called *mis-gendering*. In the early stages of a change in pronoun usage, staff and students may inadvertently use the incorrect pronoun. Typically the best way to handle this situation is to correct the pronoun (e.g., "Sorry, I meant she") and move on, not drawing attention to the mistake. Similarly, if a teacher hears another student or adult mis-gendering someone, they can gently correct them without causing further embarrassment (e.g., "Actually, Sam uses the pronoun he"). It is helpful to have a conversation

with the student to see if they would like you to correct the pronoun usage of others or if they want to handle the situation themselves. This may differ depending on whether or not they are present when the mis-gendering occurs or if they are absent (e.g., some students want to correct it themselves if they are present, but want staff to correct it if they are absent).

Adults and students mis-gendering anyone in our school communities by intentionally using the incorrect pronoun is never acceptable.

If a student and their parents/guardians disagree with the type of pronouns the student is requesting staff to use, the system support team is available for consultation.

Changes in gender identification

There are a variety of ways individuals self-identify with regards to gender. For example, individuals may identify as binary (female or male), as non-binary (e.g., both male and female, neither, or in fluid ways that change over time), as a third gender and so on. It is important not to make assumptions. The *Key Terms and Definitions* section lists a variety of terms related to gender identification. If a student makes a disclosure related to gender identity, it is best to ask how that particular student identifies and if any particular terms resonate for them.

Our Student Information System (SIS) and PASI currently have three gender options available to students – Female (F), male (M) and Other/Not Disclosed (U). A student must have one of those three codes entered (it cannot be left blank). Gender identity is based solely on self-identification and does not require any official documentation (e.g., new birth certificate, letter from a psychologist or medical professional). A gender change in SIS does require parent/guardian permission unless the student is designated as an independent student. If there is disagreement between the wishes of a student and their parent/guardians please contact the system SOGI team for consultation. See the CBE *Creating the Conditions to Thrive: Guidelines for Attending to Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sexual Orientation in our Schools* more information.

Currently in Alberta, birth certificates indicate a sex designation for all individuals (male or female). For students born in Alberta, the parents/guardians can contact Vital Statistics to request a change to the sex designation on the student's birth certificate (students born in other provinces or countries must research how to do this for their unique place of birth). Making a change to the sex designation on the Alberta birth certificate currently requires a letter from a physician or psychologist indicating that the individuals' gender identity does not match the sex designation provided at birth. Students and families may or may not choose to do this while the student is still in school. Individuals are not required to change their birth certificate

to receive support and accommodations with respect to gender at the CBE or to have their gender marker changed in SIS and PASI.

Washrooms and change rooms

Ensuring students feel safe and secure at school requires that we attend to the availability of inclusive washrooms and change rooms. Access to safe and inclusive washrooms and change rooms allow gender and sexual minority students to go freely about their day-to-day lives at school with their gender and sexual orientation identities being honoured. It is critical that careful attention be paid to the safety of the student seeking accommodation and that washroom and change room options be thoroughly discussed to identify possible safety risks for the student.

Students may access washrooms and change rooms that are congruent with their gender identity. For example, if a student was assigned the sex of “female” at birth and he self-identifies as male, he is permitted to use the boys’ washroom or change room. Strategies should be in place to help ensure that all students are aware of the behavioural expectations in washrooms and change rooms and that any form of intimidation, bullying or harassment of students using a bathroom or change room is not acceptable and will be dealt with by school staff.

Some students, whether they are gender and/or sexual minorities or not, may feel more comfortable using an all gender or universal washroom (for washroom or change room purposes) that is accessible to all students. These are single stall washrooms with floor to ceiling doors/walls that are unlocked for any student to access. Not all schools currently have these available for student use. Many schools have designated one or more of their current single stall washrooms for this purpose. It is generally most appropriate to re-label these washrooms “Washroom” and to introduce the change to students in a casual manner such as, “Students, we needed more bathroom access on the second floor so we converted one of the staff washrooms to be a washroom that is available to all students. You may now feel free to use this washroom.”

It is not best practice to have a gender or sexual minority student needing to access a key or fob to unlock a bathroom door. By doing so, the student’s gender or sexual identity may inadvertently become known based on access to a particular bathroom. Having universally accessible single stall bathrooms is the most inclusive practice. Many students appreciate the use of more private washrooms for a variety of personal, medical, religious and cultural reasons.

Gender and sexual minority students may initially feel most comfortable and safe using a universal single stall washroom for washroom or change room purposes. Over time, students may feel more comfortable using the male or female group

washrooms and change rooms. The student determines if and when they would like to use single stall versus group washrooms and change rooms.

It is helpful to make decisions regarding washroom and change room access prior to embarking on any fieldtrips or school outings. Gender and sexual minority students may feel comfortable using public washrooms that align with their gender identity. Some students, however, may not feel comfortable or safe with this option. Efforts should be made to research the availability of gender or universal washrooms at fieldtrip destinations. A call ahead of time to request this information is very helpful. When staff make these arrangements it is important that they maintain the student's confidentiality by not disclosing information related to gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation without the student's direct permission.

Any personal or safety concerns about students using a group washroom or change room, including gender or sexual minority students, would be discussed and dealt with on a case by case basis.

It is helpful to speak with the student and family regarding the washroom and change room options available and to determine the student's needs and wishes in relation to facilities. The goals of the conversation are to maximize the student's social integration, ensure the student's safety and comfort, minimize stigmatization and provide equal opportunity to participate fully in day-to-day school life, physical education and sports.

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 adult washrooms that correspond with their gender identity.

Physical education and sports

Part of healthy growth and development is being physically active and learning skills to live an active life. All students are permitted to participate in regular physical education classes. If a school has sex-segregated physical education classes, transgender and gender non-conforming students should be asked in which class they would like to be registered.

Students also have full access to 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 2015-2016 Policy Handbook (<http://www.asaa.ca/resources/asaa-bylaws-policy>).

Students may try out for, and be a part of, recreational and competitive teams that align with their gender identity. Extra care and attention should be paid to accommodating the student on sports related outings. For example, students should be asked about their preferences related to changing clothing at another school/location. It is important that these conversations take place well ahead of

time to ensure details are looked after and the student feels supported. When staff make these arrangements it is important that they maintain the student's confidentiality by not disclosing information related to gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation without the student's direct permission.

Overnight trips

The CBE provides a variety of overnight trips for students (e.g., outdoor school camps, band trips, cultural traveling experiences, etc.). The overnight sleeping accommodations for these trips vary greatly (e.g., dorm rooms, hotel rooms, camps, etc.). When a transgender or gender non-conforming student is participating in an overnight trip, consideration is given to the safety, privacy and comfort of all students involved. Transgender and gender non-conforming students have successfully been accommodated on many such trips in the past. There is no "one way" in which students are accommodated. Many factors are carefully considered including the needs and wishes of the student and their parents/guardians, the facilities where students will be sleeping, the beds in which students would be sleeping, the supervision provided, etc. It is typically beneficial for the school to communicate with system level supports to explore all of the options as part of the collaborative decision making process.

Gay-straight alliances

Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) are student clubs made up of gender and sexual minority students as well as allies (cisgender, heterosexual students). There are also teachers who serve as advisors. Students in a school with a GSA know that they have at least one or two adults they can talk to about LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer/Questioning) matters. The purpose of GSAs is to provide much needed spaces in which LGBTQ students and allies have a safe place to meet and connect. These groups also work together to make their schools more welcoming for sexual and gender minority students. The clubs should be open to all students and foster a sense of belonging and respect for diversity.

GSAs may be referred to as other names such as: Rainbow Clubs, Queer Straight Alliances, Human Rights Clubs, or Social Justice Clubs. This is sometimes done to be inclusive of non-LGBTQ membership (though, of course, some of these are not GSAs and might not address homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia), and because "Gay Straight Alliance" may seem problematic in that "gay" does not necessarily refer to lesbians or bisexuals and trans identities are not explicitly encompassed by the expression. However, using the acronym "GSA" to represent any student group concerned with LGBTQ matters has become commonplace. Very often it is LGBTQ students themselves who initiate the GSA, although sometimes a teacher will also initiate the club.

The processes and expectations for all school clubs are the same, and GSAs are supervised and organized in the same fashion. Any school with students requesting the establishment of a GSA must grant the request. Teachers can access the system level supports (see System Supports section) for assistance and to connect with other teachers supporting the work of GSAs. The establishment of a GSA should follow the same protocol for the way all other clubs in the school are established. Additionally, the student body should be made aware of the new club the same way they are made aware of other clubs in the school. If, for example, new clubs are announced in the daily school announcements, the GSA club should be announced in the same way. The [Alberta Teachers Association](#) has several resources to assist schools in establishing and running GSA clubs.

Minimizing gender-segregated activities

In an effort to be inclusive of all gender identities and expressions, it is important to reduce all gender-segregated activities to the greatest extent possible. Doing so helps students of all ages express themselves as freely as possible and to learn, play, dress, and present themselves in ways that are congruent with their gender identities and gender expressions.

Best practices in this area include dividing students for games, competitions, assignments, and so on based on something other than gender (e.g., dividing students based on interests, counting off, left side of the room versus right side of the room, alphabetically, etc.). Having students line up or participate according to their gender results in some students feeling marginalized and left out.

In circumstances where activities need to be organized by gender (which are rare), students who are transgender or gender non-conforming should have the support to participate safely and to the full extent in accordance with their gender identity and/or gender expression.

Student attire

Students are free to dress and present themselves in a manner that reflects their gender identity, gender expression, personal taste and comfort. Expectations related to student dress should 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 expected to maintain standards related to appropriate attire (e.g., no offensive words or visuals on clothing, clothing that appropriately covers the body, etc.).

Safety

In order for students to fully participate in school life they must feel welcome and safe. The CBE as a system and each school individually, has the responsibility to ensure that our schools are safe and inclusive for all. This involves ensuring that we thoughtfully examine and adopt universal strategies to promote positive, pro-active behaviours with students, families and staff. It also involves being explicit in our messaging that harassment and discrimination of any student, family member or staff member for any reason, including their gender and sexual minority status, is never acceptable. If and when any harassment or bullying occurs it should be dealt with in a timely and just manner in accordance with CBE Code of Conduct, administrative regulations and school procedures.

Inclusive curriculum/resources and access to information

The existence of sexual and gender minority people is often omitted or only included in a highly stigmatized way in classrooms, as well as in the media and popular culture. The lack of positive acknowledgment of sexual and gender minority issues or queer history makes it difficult for gender minority, sexual minority, or questioning young people to feel that they have a place in the world. The omission of these important groups from curriculum, programs of study, resources and assessments, creates a misconception among many students that sexual and gender minority people do not exist or are in some way inferior. Therefore, CBE staff members are encouraged to challenge gender and sexual orientation stereotypes and integrate sexual and gender minority positive content into teaching and learning on a regular basis.

Family members

It is important that the family members of our students feel welcomed, respected and valued in our schools. We celebrate the full range of diversity of our family members including those who are sexual or gender minorities. One of the ways in which we can increase the likelihood of family members feeling included is through our use of language. School staff should 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 “Children, 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, foster parents, etc.).

When interacting with gender or sexual minority parents, ask how to best acknowledge and communicate with them (e.g., ask how the children refer to each

of their parents/guardians). If a parent/guardian or family member discloses their sexual or gender minority status, ask if they would like that information to be held in confidence or if they typically share that information more broadly. Some family members share this information in confidence and some are very public about their gender identities and sexual orientation.

Parents/guardians, staff and other adults in our schools are welcome to access the adult washrooms that correspond with their gender identity. Our longstanding practice is also that all adults in schools are asked to use the adult washrooms, not student washrooms.

Information/support

Please send any requests for information or support to:

Tamara Gordon, Supervisor Psychological Services

trgordon@cbe.ab.ca

or

Maureen Nielsen, Learning

mgnielsen@cbe.ab.ca



Appendix A: Education Act and Ministry Program and Policy Memorandums

School Act

Preamble: Whereas students are entitled to a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and nurtures a sense of belonging and positive sense of self.

[The Alberta School Act Section 45.1](#)

A board shall ensure that each student enrolled in a school operated by the board is provided with a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging

[The ATA Code of Professional Conduct](#)

The teacher teaches in a manner that respects the dignity and rights of all persons without prejudice as to race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical characteristics, disability, marital status, family status, age, ancestry, place of origin, place of residence, socio-economic background or linguistic background.

[The Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities for Teachers](#)

(9) Teachers have the right to be protected against discrimination on the basis of prejudice as to race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical characteristics, disability, marital status, family status, age, ancestry, place of origin, place of residence, socio-economic background or linguistic background and have the responsibility to refrain from practicing these forms of discrimination in their professional duties.

[Canadian Charter of Rights & Freedoms](#)

Section 15 (1) of the *Charter* states that:

Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

Although Section 15(1) of the *Charter* does not explicitly refer to sexual orientation in its equality provisions, the courts have regarded sexual orientation as analogous to the other personal characteristics listed and have read it into the Charter. The inclusion and the accommodation of difference are what underlie the spirit and intent of Section 15.

In the context of education, courts have held that publicly funded schools, school boards and the actions/non-actions of school officials are subject to *Charter* scrutiny. As a result, *all* students have the right to freedom from discrimination in school settings. Teachers, administrators and school boards have a responsibility to ensure that LGBTQ youth and their families are treated with respect and dignity.

Addressing homophobia and heterosexism is vital to the health and safety needs of all students and teachers.

[Bill C-250 – An Act to amend the Criminal Code \(Hate Propaganda\)](#)

Bill C-250 was passed in the House of Commons in February 2004, amending Section 318 (Hate Propaganda) and Section 319 (Incitement of Hatred) of the *Criminal Code of Canada* to include sexual orientation within the listing of identifiable groups against which hate propaganda is deemed a criminal offense.

[Alberta Human Rights Act \(“AHRA”\)](#)

Discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and gender expression is expressly prohibited in all areas of day to day life including in publications (s. 3); goods, services, accommodation or facilities customarily available to the public (s. 4); employment (s. 7);

While s.11 of the *AHRA*, provides that there is no contravention of the *Act* if the conduct was reasonable or justifiable in the circumstances, where the inherent dignity of all persons is at issue, discrimination on the basis of any of the prohibited grounds including sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression will not be viewed as justifiable.

Teachers, administrators and school boards have a mandated professional responsibility to ensure that LGBTQ youth are treated with respect and integrity within their classroom and school communities.

Appendix B: Guiding Conversation Questions

The following questions may help guide conversations with students and are provided as examples of how to ask questions in a supportive manner:

- Thank you for sharing this information with me. I know that people have a wide variety of gender identities. You shared that you don't feel like a girl. Is there a gender identity that fits for you?
- You shared that you identify with the term (fill in term here such as pansexual, gender queer, gender fluid, trans, etc.). That term can mean different things to different people. What does that term mean to you?
- How much of this have you shared with your parents/guardians?
- Why haven't you shared more with your family?
- Do you want to share more information with your family? How can I help you in doing that? Would you like to talk through some ways for you to share? Would you like me to be there? Would you like me to share information with them on your behalf?
- What are you worried might happen if you shared this information with your family/friends/classmates/teachers, etc.?
- What name and name/pronouns would you like us to use here at school? How would you like us to refer to you?
- What can we do that would be the most helpful and supportive? What questions do you have? What are you concerned or worried about?
- Who else knows about this? Do your friends here at school know? Do your parents/guardians know? Who are your biggest supporters?
- What, if any, information would you like shared with school staff and with other students? In what ways?
- How does it feel to have told me this information?

Appendix C: Roles and Responsibilities

Every person plays an important role and has a responsibility in creating welcoming, caring, safe and respectful environments so that all members of the CBE community are able to thrive.

Students work to:

- Be diligent in pursuing their studies.
- Attend school regularly and punctually.
- Comply with the rules of the school.
- Respect the rights of others.
- Ensure that their conduct contributes to a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging.
- Refrain from, report and not tolerate bullying or bullying behaviour directed toward others in the school, whether or not it occurs within the school building, during the day or by electronic means.
- Positively contribute to the student's school and community.

Parents work to:

- Ensure their conduct contributes to a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment.
- To encourage, foster and advance collaboration, positive and respectful relationships with teachers, principals, and other school staff and professionals providing supports and services in the school.
- Engage in their children's school community.

School staff members work to:

- Model respect, understanding, and affirmation of diversity in the working and learning environment.
- Educate themselves so they are aware of available resources to help connect students to the supports they need.
- Ensure curriculum and classroom materials and activities contain positive images and accurate information about culture and history that reflects the contributions and accomplishments of sexual and gender minority populations.

- Respect the privacy and confidentiality of colleagues and students in the event of disclosure of an individual's gender identity or sexual orientation.
- Educate themselves on the needs of gender and sexual minority students and families.

Calgary Board of Education system level staff members work to:

- Promote and celebrate diversity as the full range of uniqueness within humanity.
- Ensure that administrative regulations, policies, guidelines and resources protect and reflect the needs of gender and sexual minority students, families and staff.
- Provide information and professional learning opportunities on creating welcoming, caring, safe and respectful learning environments for gender and sexual minority students, families and staff.
- Provide ongoing support to school staff members related to the needs of gender and sexual minority students, families and staff.
- Ensure evidence-based best practices are used when making decisions about students, families and staff.