



Frequently Asked Questions for Parents/Guardians: Guidelines for best practices for LGBTQ students, parents/guardians, and staff

Introduction

In Livingstone Range School Division, 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 gender and sexual minority youth, whose rights are expressed in law in Alberta's School Act and the Alberta Human Rights Act.

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

In January 2016, Alberta Education released new Guidelines for school boards to use in creating their own policies/guidelines to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) students, families, and staff. All school boards in Alberta used these Guidelines to inform their own policies, administrative procedures, and guidelines. (Although this 2016 document is currently archived, Alberta Education is working on an updated document which we will update once available.)

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. As a whole, this is a vulnerable group that is often marginalized and typically experiences much higher rates of harassment, discrimination, assaults, suicide rates, homelessness, poor health outcomes, and so on. The Guidelines are important to enhance the safety of and learning conditions for LGBTQ students.

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 LGBTQ students are not open about their sexual or gender identity. If a student discloses that they are LGBTQ to an LRSD staff member, that information will be held in confidence and not shared without the student's permission.

Name and Pronoun Usage

What names can students use?

Honouring student requests regarding their preferred name is an important part of helping them feel supported and accepted. Students and/or 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.

What gender and pronouns are used?

When students and/or parents/guardians meet with school staff they may also discuss what gender the student identifies with and what pronouns they would like to use. Some students may use gender-specific pronouns (she/her and he/him) and others may use gender-neutral pronouns (they/them). These gender-neutral pronouns have been in use for many years and are very familiar to many of our students, families, and staff.

Washrooms and Change Rooms

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

Transgender students have the legal right to access the washroom and change room that corresponds with their gender identity as described in the Canadian Human Rights Act and Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. 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 Family School Liaison Counsellor.

To the best of our knowledge 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.

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 adult washrooms that correspond with their gender identity.

Overnight Trips

How are overnight trips handled?

LRSB 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., 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 parents/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 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 may dress and present themselves in a manner that reflects their gender identity, personal taste, and comfort. Expectations related to student dress are not 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. School staff 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.

Resources

Visit the [Welcoming, Safe, Caring, and Respectful Schools](#) page on our website for links to our Board Policies and Administrative Procedures on this topic.

Further Questions

If you have specific questions/concerns about the provincial Guidelines, please contact Alberta Education directly. If you have questions about how these will impact your school and your child we hope this FAQ will help. If you have follow-up questions, they are best directed to your school principal.

This document was adapted from Calgary Board of Education