

SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 28 (QUESNEL)

P O L I C Y

NO.: 318 - SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

Education Committee

Ref: Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

RATIONALE:

The Board of Education (the "Board") recognizes that, in general, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transexual, two-spirited, intersex, or questioning ("LGBTQ") individuals and their families are often subjected to marginalization and discrimination in society and schools. Homophobic slurs and negative comments such as "That's so gay" are common and are particularly harmful to LGBTQ individuals in schools.

The Board recognizes that such problems need to be addressed to enhance safety and acceptance for all in our schools.

POLICY:

The Board recognizes and values the diversity found within its school communities and believes that each individual contributes to the strength of the district's culture. The Board also recognizes that students, staff and other school community members identifying as, or perceived to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transexual, two-spirited, intersex, or questioning face a unique set of challenges within our schools and communities. These members of the school community, as well as their families, are frequently the targets of homophobic, transphobic or heterosexist behaviours. This often results in a deeply personal struggle with profound social and personal consequences which could include discrimination, harassment, physical and sexual violence, social and emotional isolation, substance abuse, homelessness, school truancy and drop-out, self harm and suicide.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure the Board provides a safe and positive learning and working environment for all students, staff and school community members. *In accordance with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Board values all its students without discrimination.* Through on-going educational initiatives and opportunities for all students and employees, the Board is committed to raising awareness and improving the understanding of the lives of people who are identified, or perceived to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transexual, two-spirited, intersex, or questioning.

BACKGROUND:

Some people may wonder why a policy on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity is necessary for the Quesnel School District. The primary reason is that safer and more

accepting schools facilitate learning and achievement. When certain groups of students are bullied and harassed routinely, chances are that their educational achievement will be compromised. Homophobic bullying is a routine form of bullying that takes place in all schools. LGBTQ students and any student who does not conform to rigid gender role stereotypes can frequently be the target of homophobic or transphobic bullying. Recent research in Canada makes it clear that students of minority sexualities and gender identities are at risk. In BC, for example, research undertaken by the McCreary Centre Society found in 2007 that lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth were more likely than heterosexual counterparts to have:

- experienced physical and sexual abuse, harassment in school, and discrimination in the community;
- reported emotional stress, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts; and
- experienced lower levels of protective factors such as family and school connectedness.

Similarly, the First National Climate Survey on Homophobia in Canadian schools, published in 2011 by the Egale Canada Human Rights Trust, found that:

- LGBTQ students are exposed to language that insults their dignity as part of everyday school experience;
- LGBTQ students experience much higher levels of verbal, physical and other forms of harassment than other students;
- many LGBTQ students do not feel safe at school;
- many teachers look the other way or fail to take action when they hear homophobic comments.

In this same study non-LGBTQ students also report being the target of homophobic bullying:

- three out of ten straight students were verbally harassed because of their expression of gender;
- just under half of non-LGBTQ students have seen homophobic graffiti at school;
- one in ten non-LGBTQ students had rumours or lies spread about their sexual orientation at school.

According to the BC Centre for Safe Schools, 2007:

- 40% of the non-LGBTQ student population were the targets of homophobic slurs

(Please refer to the Resources section for links to these reports and other resources.)

A significant point in addition to the findings of these three reports is that homophobia is directed not only to students who happen to identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, two-spirited, intersex, or questioning. Any student, regardless of actual sexuality or gender identity, can be bullied through homophobia. Often students who are considered 'different' are the targets of homophobic bullying (Walton, 2010).

Boards of Education are responsible for taking appropriate and reasonable measures for enhancing safety for all students and must minimize particular ways that many students feel unsafe. Homophobia is one of those ways. This policy is a step towards enhancing safety for all students so that they can learn in more accepting, welcoming, and safer environments.

In the Quesnel School District, students, parents, staff, and teachers represent a wide spectrum of social diversity. As a school district, we strive to enhance respect for diversity in all forms, in accordance with the District's social responsibility obligations.

This policy is in accord with the inclusion of sexual orientation as a recognized category of human rights in national and provincial policies such as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Canadian Human Rights Act, and the British Columbia Human Rights Code. In addition, this policy is supported by the Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools mandate of the British Columbia Ministry of Education which states that:

British Columbia schools are striving to develop positive, welcoming school cultures and are committed to fostering optimal environments for learning. Members of these school communities share a commitment to maintaining safe, caring and orderly schools. They are striving to work together to better understand issues such as bullying, intimidation and harassment, racism, sexism and homophobia, and to learn new skills to respond to them.