

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS Regarding Gender Identity Policy and Procedure in GPPSD**



### **What is the purpose of the “Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Expressions and Gender Identities” document?**

At the direction of the Minister of Education, Alberta Education released the Guidelines to help School Districts establishing new Policies and Procedures to support learning environments that respect diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expression.

### **Why are we focusing on policy and procedure for such a small minority of students?**

In addition to following the direction given our Board by the Minister of Education, supporting vulnerable students is the right thing to do. Creating focused Policy or Procedures to protect vulnerable groups is a commonly used strategy.

Statistics support that transgendered students are at significantly higher risk of not being engaged in school and are at a significantly higher risk of attempting suicide.

*<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cphorsphc-respcacsp/2011/cphorsphc-respcacsp-06-eng.php>*

### **Are things going to be substantially different in GPPSD schools now?**

No. The school experience in GPPSD will be essentially the same tomorrow as it was yesterday. Our staff remain committed to working with students and parents to support the needs of all students. Our mission remains to ensure every student succeeds.

### **Who decides what is taught in Alberta schools?**

The curriculum in Alberta schools is developed by Alberta Education and all schools are expected to teach students the same curricular outcomes.

### **Are our children going to be less safe at school than they have been in the past?**

No. We remain committed to ensuring that all our schools provide for learning environments that are safe, caring and inclusive of the needs of all students. We will continue to ensure concerns about discrimination, harassment and bullying are addressed promptly and appropriately.

### **Are the beliefs of one group of our population more valued than the beliefs of another group of our population?**

No. Diverse beliefs and opinions can, and will continue, to exist. Diversity can make our schools better when everyone is able to hold their own beliefs while at the same time being respectful of others who's beliefs may differ from their own.

### **Are gender-specific bathrooms going away?**

No. We will not be doing away with gender-specific bathrooms. The Guidelines call for the designation of gender neutral bathrooms, or access to bathrooms that fit consistently asserted gender, where possible.

A child will not be permitted to choose to access a different gender specific bathroom on a whim. A detailed plan and careful consideration of the student's situation must be in place before any change in bathroom usage will be implemented. This is a rare situation, and will involve the school, family, and likely other specialist supports.

Our bathrooms are equipped with stalls, and an appropriate level of privacy will be maintained. When necessary, whether for issues related to gender identity or for other reasons, a gender neutral, private bathroom will be available.

Adult visitors to schools, during the school day, will be directed to use the staff washrooms rather than student washrooms.

### **Are the pronouns used at school changing?**

The Guidelines refer to using alternative pronouns, but there is no directive to do away with gender-specific pronouns. Neither is there a directive to stop referring to mothers or fathers.

### **Are sports teams going to all be co-ed now?**

No. There is no directive to eliminate gender-specific sports teams. The legal right for children to participate on sports teams that do not align with their consistently asserted gender has existed for some time, and the recommendation in the Guidelines is not new. This is an extremely rare occurrence and is not likely to occur often in the future.

### **Can schools keep information from parents about their children's gender beliefs?**

The Guidelines identify that privacy is an essential right of children. Schools recognize the right of parents to be involved in their children's education. If a situation exists at school that requires additional support for students, the school will work with parents to ensure the student has the support needed and that parents are aware of the need for support.

### **What training will teachers receive to support them using a balanced approach and to support all students who hold a wide range of personal beliefs?**

Our District remains committed to providing ALL STUDENTS with a respectful learning environment. This issue will be the topic of discussion at staff meetings and relevant training and support will be provided staff as it is needed.

### **What is the legal basis for this issue in Alberta?**

Gender is a protected area in Alberta Human Rights legislation. Additionally, Bill 10, passed by the previous government in March of 2015, supports the current Guidelines by establishing the right for students to request Gay-Straight Alliances in Alberta schools. The current directive to support respectful, gender-inclusive school environments is an extension of both of the previously referenced pieces of legislation.



# Safe and Caring working and Learning Environments

## Information Package

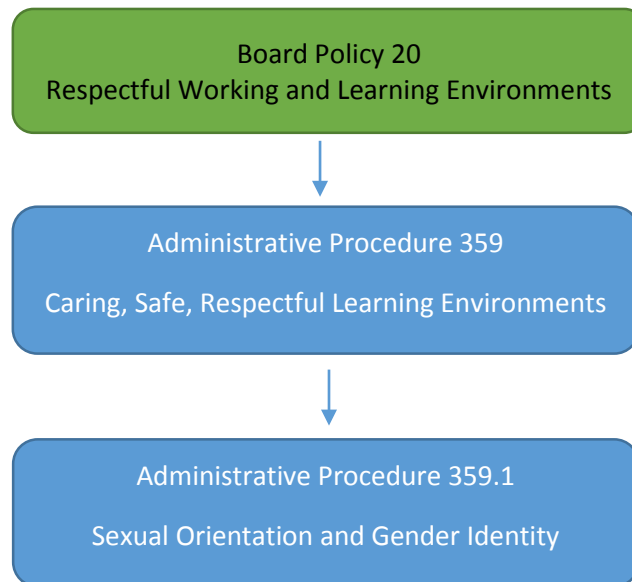
Thank you for taking the opportunity to provide feedback on the following Policies and Administrative Procedures:

- **Board Policy 20:** Respectful Working and Learning Environments
- **Administrative Procedure 359.1:** Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Practice in our District is guided by two levels of policy development. The first level consists of 20 'Board Policies'. These are global policies that focus on the work of the Trustees and establish the general direction for the work of the District. Each Board Policy is supported by a series of Administrative Procedures.

The second level consists of a number of 'Administrative Procedures' and these are more focused on the daily operation of the District. These procedures range from accounting practices to program development to staffing practices to the administration of field trips etc.

### Sample Structure:



**Board Policy 20:** BP 20 is a values statement made by the Board around ensuring that all of our sites are free of discrimination, harassment, and bullying. Board Policy 20 prohibits these activities and outlines the Administrative Procedures that support its implementation.

**Administrative Procedure 359.1:** Admin Procedure 359.1 is a companion AP to the larger AP 359, Caring, Safe, Respectful, Learning Environments. The Minister of Education has given directive to establish policies and procedures that attend specifically to the rights of the LGBTQ community. They have provided a set of guidelines to assist in the development of these policies/ procedures. AP 359 establishes provisions for all learners on our system and AP 359.1 focuses specifically on the LGBTQ community.

<p><b><i>Policy &amp; Operations</i></b></p> <p><b><i>Manual</i></b></p> <p>PAGE: 1 of 2</p>	<p>Policy 20 TITLE: Respectful Working and Learning Environments APPROVED: AMENDED/REVIEWED:</p>
<p>LEGAL REFERENCE: School Act 2000, Sec. 45 (1), Education Act 2012, Sec. 35.1; Alberta Human Rights Act; Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; Administrative Procedures 170, 171, 359</p>	

## Policy

Each and every student and staff member within the Grande Prairie Public School Board has a right to work and learn in an environment that is respectful of individual diversity, engenders a feeling of safety, and is free from bullying, discrimination, and harassment.

The Board is committed to providing a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning and working environment free from bullying, harassment, discrimination, and violence. The application of this policy will apply to all involved with the District including trustees, employees, students, parents, volunteers, contractors, and visitors. All will share in the responsibility for eliminating bullying, discrimination, harassment, and violence. The application of this policy will apply to all Board operated sites and includes field trips and other off-site activities engaged in by students and staff. The Board prohibits bullying, harassing, discriminatory, and violent behaviours and expects allegations of such behaviours to be investigated in a timely and respectful manner.

A key outcome for the District is that all staff and students will possess a strong connection to their schools as welcoming, caring, respectful and safe places focused on their individualized success.

## Guidelines

The Board acknowledges its responsibility to ensure welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments for all students and staff. It recognizes the importance of students' emotional, social, intellectual and physical wellness to their success in school and expects students to adhere to the District Code of Conduct and schools' codes of conduct.

1. The Board expects all trustees, employees, students, parents, volunteers, visitors, and contractors to embrace and support this policy. This policy covers:
  - 1.1 Behaviour at District schools and any school-related activity;
  - 1.2 Behaviour that is face-to-face, by telephone, fax, e-mail, Internet/Intranet or any other means of communication;
  - 1.3 Behaviour that is threatening, harassing, intimidating, assaulting or bullying, in any way, to anyone within the school community;
  - 1.4 Behaviour that is aggressive such as "cyber" hate messaging and websites created at an individual's home or in other settings; and
  - 1.5 Behaviour that has a negative impact on the individual in a school environment.

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2. The Board encourages reporting to a responsible adult within the District all incidents of threats, bullying, harassment, violence or intimidation regardless of the identity of the alleged harasser or offender.
3. The Board provides a method to attend to harassment, bullying, and discrimination through Administrative Procedure 170 and 171.
4. The Board recognizes the Trustees may, at times, engage in vigorous debate and provides a method to attend to harassment, bullying and discrimination in regard to Trustees of the Board through Board Policy 6, Trustee Code of Ethics.

### Definitions

1. **Harassment:** Unwelcome, discriminatory conduct or behaviour, or verbal or physical conduct, that focuses on race, religious beliefs, gender, gender identity, physical disability, mental disability, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, or age. Harassment includes conduct that disparages, humiliates, or harms another person. It may involve abuse of authority but does not include the legitimate exercise of an individual's positional authority. Harassment may undermine another individual's personal dignity by causing embarrassment, discomfort, humiliation, and may interfere with an individual's work performance by creating an intimidating or hostile work or learning environment. The behaviour giving rise to a complaint is typically intentional in order to be considered harassment. This behaviour is often repeated; however, there may instances of a singular vexatious event that may be considered harassment. The expectation is that the offender ought to reasonably know that the behaviour is offensive and unwelcome. Any member of the District who believes he/she has been subjected to harassment is encouraged to make it known to the harasser that the behaviour is offensive and contrary to this Board Policy.
2. **Discrimination:** The abusive, unfair, or demeaning treatment of a person or group of persons on the basis of race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, gender identity, physical disability, mental disability, age, sexual orientation, ancestry or place of origin when such treatment has the effect or purpose of unreasonably interfering with that person's or group's status or performance, or of creating a hostile or intimidating educational environment
3. **Bullying:** A conscious, willful, deliberate, repeated and hostile activity marked by an imbalance of power, intent to harm and/or threat of aggression.

<b>Administrative Procedures Manual</b>	<b>Administrative Procedure 359.1</b>
	<b>Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity</b>
Page 1 of 5	APPROVED: AMENDED/REVIEWED:
LEGAL REFERENCE:	Canadian Human Rights Act; Alberta Human Rights Act; Individual's Rights Protection Act; Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; Alberta Education Act; School Act; Alberta Teachers' Association Code of Professional Conduct; Alberta Teachers' Association Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities; Criminal Code

**Background**

The Grande Prairie Public School District affirms the right of all students and staff to be a contributing member of a school community that is safe, caring, and respectful of all people regardless of sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or gender expression. The Grande Prairie Public School district does not tolerate any bullying, harassment, or discrimination directed at individuals or groups of individuals based on their sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or gender expression.

**Foundations and Basic Commitments**

- Board Policy 20 affirms the commitment of the trustees of the Grande Prairie Public School District to support respectful working and learning environments in all District sites.
- [AP 359, Caring, Safe, Respectful Learning Environments](#), commits all staff members of the Grande Prairie Public School District to ensuring that our classrooms, schools, and all work spaces are free of bullying, discrimination and harassment.
- Discrimination and harassment occurs when a person is subjected to unwelcome verbal, written, or physical conduct because of race, religious beliefs, colour, place of origin, **gender, gender identity, gender expression**, physical or mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status or **sexual orientation**. Alberta human rights law prohibits discrimination and harassment based on these grounds.
- The Grande Prairie Public School District is committed to addressing complaints of discrimination, harassment, and bullying related to sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, or gender expression. Specific provisions for are supported by [AP 170 \(Harassment\)](#), [AP 171 \(Student Harassment and Discrimination\)](#), [AP 175 \(Protection of Staff\)](#), and [AP 359 \(Caring, Safe, Respectful Learning Environments\)](#)
- The Grande Prairie Public School District is committed to ensuring that all [Board Policies](#) and [Administrative Procedures](#) supporting safe and caring working and learning environments are recognized and understood by staff and students.

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**Procedures**

**District Leadership will:**

1. Ensure that all aspects of this Administrative Procedure are clearly communicated to staff, students, and the public;
2. Provide opportunities for staff to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes to appropriately support all students in safe and caring learning and working environments;
3. Collect, evaluate, and distribute current supporting resources for administration to support all students and staff;
4. Maintain District policies and procedures to ensure they are current with accepted best practices.

**School Leadership will:**

1. Strive to create schools which reflect the values of the District in terms of safe and caring learning and working environments;
2. Ensure staff have an appropriate level of understanding of District policies and procedures;
3. Ensure that complaints of discrimination, harassment, and bullying are taken seriously, investigated, properly documented, and dealt with in a timely manner. Documentation should be compiled and retained using the Bully-related Behaviours report form.
4. Support the establishment of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA's) where interest by students has been expressed;
5. Ensure all staff recognize the confidentiality of sexual orientation and gender identity of all students.

**School Staff will:**

1. Foster learning and working environments that reflect the District's commitment to safe and caring learning and working environments;
2. Be respectful of diversity in the school and among staff;
3. Address all discriminatory attitudes and behaviours in establishing safe and caring learning and working environments;
4. Report to school administration any repeated behavior directed towards students identified in this policy.

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## **Gender Identity and Gender Expression**

To support the safety, health, and educational needs of students and staff who identify as or are perceived to be transgender or transsexual persons, district staff shall adhere to the following recommended practices wherever possible and appropriate.

### **Names and Pronouns**

A student or staff member has the right to be addressed by a name and pronoun that corresponds to his or her consistently asserted gender identity.

### **Official Records and Communication**

When requested by an independent student, or the parent/guardian, the student's official record will be changed to reflect their preferred name, sex, or gender. All Grande Prairie Public School District forms and records shall be changed to ensure that a student's preferred name and sex or gender is current on class lists, timetables, student files, identification cards, etc. Please note, changes in name may not be incorporated into official documents such as diplomas, transcripts, or provincial exams. Students are advised that a legal name change is required if they desire their official Alberta Education documents to reflect their new name.

### **Athletics, Locker Room, and Change Room Access and Accommodation**

All schools shall proactively review their student athletic policies to ensure they are inclusive of sexual and gender minority students. Transgender and transsexual students shall not be required to become involved in extracurricular activities outside of the regularly scheduled physical education class time.

In locker rooms that require undressing in front of others, students who desire increased privacy, for any reason (e.g., medical, religious, cultural, gender identity, etc.) should be advised that the school will make every reasonable effort to provide accommodations that best meet their individual needs and privacy concerns.

Any student, staff, coach, manager, trainer or other persons who identify as or are perceived as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, queer or questioning may participate fully and safely in sex separated sport activities in accordance with their consistently asserted identity. ([Alberta Schools Athletic Association](#))

### **Dress Code**

All students have the right to dress in a manner consistent with their gender identity or gender expression in accordance with [Administrative Procedure 350.1 \(Student Dress Code\)](#).

### **Restroom Accessibility**

All students shall have access to the restroom that allows for appropriate privacy. Where possible, students should be permitted access to the bathroom which aligns with their consistently



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asserted gender. Where this is not possible, schools will assign gender-neutral bathrooms. The Principal shall ensure that individual solutions to restroom access are implemented with respect and discretion. Staff shall consistently demonstrate sensitivity to the needs and safety of all students with respect to restroom access.

**Resolving Conflict**

The principal will support the resolution of disputes that may arise with regard to a transgender or transsexual student's participation in educational or athletic activities. The principal will ensure that the resolution of any conflict ensures reasonable accommodation and inclusiveness and is consistent with Board Policy and Administrative Procedures.

District Leadership will provide support, directly or indirectly, to school administration in support of dispute resolution.

**Gay-Straight Alliances**

A Gay-Straight Alliance or GSA is a student run, extra-curricular club that provides a supportive environment for students to meet, offer peer support, and talk about issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity. Typical to a high school or middle level environment, GSA's have a focus on ending homophobia and transphobia. Activities of clubs fall within the domain of social support and pro-social activism.

[Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Alberta Bill of Rights to Protect our Children](#), came into effect on June 1, 2015. The legislation promotes welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging. The Act requires boards to allow students to establish gay-straight alliances in their school and ensures that a staff member will be designated to support the club, should students request one.

**Definitions**

**Asexual:** a person whose interest in others does not include sexuality.

**Bisexual:** a person who is attracted physically, sexually, and emotionally to persons of the same or opposite sex.

**Cisgender:** a person whose gender identity, gender expression, and birth sex align with the conventional gender of male or female.

**Gender:** refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women.

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**Gender Expression:** the manner in which people express their gender identity to others.

**Gender Dysmorphia:** internalized conflict arising from an incongruity between one's birth sex and one's sense of gender identity.

**Gender Identity:** is a person's internal sense or feeling of maleness or femaleness. It relates to how a person views oneself.

**GSA:** school-based 'gay-straight alliance'.

**Heterosexual:** a person who is physically, sexually, and emotionally attracted to someone of the opposite sex. Commonly referred to as 'straight'.

**Homosexual:** a person who is physically, sexually, and emotionally attracted to a person of the same sex. Commonly referred to as 'gay'.

**LGBTQ:** commonly used acronym for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, transsexual, two-spirited, queer, and questioning

**Questioning:** a person who is unsure of his or her gender identity or sexual orientation.

**Sex:** refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define male and female.

**Sexual Orientation:** refers to feelings of attraction and identification with persons of the same or opposite gender.

**Sexual minority:** an umbrella category for lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities.

**Transgender, Trans-identified, Trans\*:** a person whose asserted gender, gender identity, outward appearance, or gender expression does not conform to conventional expectations of males and females. Trans\* individuals normally identify with a gender different from the gender they were assigned at birth.

*(Supporting Transgender and Transsexual Students in K-12 Schools  
[Canadian Teachers' Federation](#))*