

Vancouver School Board

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Two-Spirit, Questioning POLICY **(Feb. 2004)**

Intent

The Board of School Trustees (the “Board”) is committed to establishing and maintaining a safe and positive learning environment for all students and employees including those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, or who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity. These students and employees, as all students and employees, have the right to learn and work in an environment free of discrimination and harassment. The letter and spirit of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *B. C. Human Rights Acts* and the *Collective Agreements* shall be carefully observed, enforced, and supported, so that all members of the school community may work together in an atmosphere of respect and tolerance for individual differences. Specifically, the Board will not tolerate hate crimes, harassment or discrimination, and will vigorously enforce policy and regulations dealing with such matters.

The Board will provide a safe environment, free from harassment and discrimination, while also promoting pro-active strategies and guidelines to ensure that lesbian, gay, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, bisexual and questioning students, employees and families are welcomed and included in all aspects of education and school life and treated with respect and dignity. The purpose of this policy is to define appropriate behaviours and actions in order to prevent discrimination and harassment through greater awareness of and responsiveness to their deleterious effects. This policy is also drafted to ensure that homophobic complaints are taken seriously and dealt with expeditiously and effectively through consistently applied policy and procedures. The policy will also raise awareness and improve understanding of the lives of people who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. By valuing diversity and respecting differences, students and staff act in accordance with the Vancouver district’s social responsibility initiative.

Leadership

The Vancouver School Board shall ensure that all staff will be able to identify individual discriminatory attitudes and behaviours, as well as work to eliminate the systemic inequities and barriers to learning for students who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity and demonstrate accountability for their removal so that all students are treated with fairness and respect.

All administrators, teachers, counselors, and staff and student leaders will communicate the board’s position to their employees, staff and students. In the course of their leadership roles, they will commit to listen to lesbian, gay, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, bisexual and questioning youth and their designated support groups and take concrete actions to make schools more welcoming and safer places for these students.

The Board shall consult with the LGBTTTQ Advisory Committee to ensure that policy directions, priorities and implementation of programs and services are consistent with this LGBTTTQ policy.

Counselling and Student Support

The Vancouver School Board is committed to maintaining a safe learning and working environment which actively provides counselling and support to students who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. All counsellors provided by the board shall be educated in the knowledge and skills required to deal with LGBTTTQ issues with students. Counsellors will be

informed and familiar with all policies with respect to human rights, anti-homophobia, hate literature, discrimination and harassment, and will alert their school community to these policies. Counsellors will be sensitive to lesbian, gay, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, bisexual and questioning students as well as students from LGBTTT headed families.

Elementary and secondary schools are encouraged to appoint a staff person to be a safe contact for students who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. School administrators should inform students and other staff about the location and availability of this contact person. Schools are encouraged in their goal planning to advocate for students who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity and those who are questioning their gender identity. Where students request and where staff are willing to volunteer their time, Gay/Straight Alliance clubs (GSAs) will be encouraged at secondary schools in the district.

Anti-Harassment

Homophobic harassment is demeaning treatment to all students, students' parents or guardians, and employees regardless of their sexual orientation. Harassment based on gender identities is also demeaning to all students and employees. These forms of harassment and discrimination are prohibited under the B.C. Human Rights Code.

Any language or behaviour that deliberately degrades, denigrates, labels, stereotypes, incites hatred, prejudice, discrimination, harassment towards students or employees on the basis of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identification will not be tolerated. Schools will be encouraged to specifically include the prohibition of such language and behaviour in their student codes of conduct. Please refer to the "General Anti-Harassment VSB Policy".

Curriculum Learning Resources

Anti-Homophobia Education strives to identify and change educational practices, policies, and procedures that promote homophobia, as well as the homophobic attitudes and behaviours that underlie and reinforce such policies and practices. Anti-homophobia education provides knowledge, skills, and strategies for educators to examine such discrimination critically in order to understand its origin and to recognize and challenge it.

The Board is committed to enabling all lesbian, gay, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, bisexual and questioning students to see themselves and their lives positively reflected in the curriculum. Resources should be chosen or updated in order to promote critical thinking and include materials that accurately reflect the range of Canada's LGBTTTQ communities. Keeping in mind the multi-cultural aspect of the district, as many of the above resources as possible should be available in different languages and in formats easily accessible to ESL students.

Staff Development, In Service and Professional Development

The Vancouver School Board is committed to ongoing staff development in anti-homophobia education and sexual orientation equity for trustees and Board staff, and will assist them to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours to identify and eliminate homophobic practices. The Board will provide in-service training for teaching and support staff in anti-homophobia methodologies to enable them to deliver an inclusive curriculum. The Board will also provide in-service training for employees to deal effectively and confidently with issues of homophobia, heterosexism and gender identity and support initiatives that foster dialogue to create understanding and respect for diversity.

School-Community Involvement

The Vancouver School Board is committed to ongoing, constructive and open dialogue with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities and other communities who identify themselves on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity to increase co-operation and collaboration among home, school and the community.

The Board will work to create partnerships that ensure effective participation in the education process by representative and inclusive organizations and LGBTTTQ communities that are committed to the mission of the VSB. (To enable students to reach their intellectual, social, aesthetic and physical potential in challenging and stimulating settings which reflect the worth of each individual and promote mutual respect, co-operation, and social responsibility.)

The Board will encourage parent advisory councils to reflect the diversity of the District.

The Vancouver School Board will acknowledge through its communication to students, staff, and the community that some children live in LGBTTT-headed families and need to be positively recognized and included as such. Any information to students and parents on anti-homophobia, anti-discrimination and sexual orientation equity needs to be translated into the languages spoken in the home. Parent Advisory Councils and students will be encouraged to engage in dialogue with openly identified LGBTTTQ youth and their organizations.

Employment Equity

The Board of School Trustees (the “Board”) believes in equitable treatment for all individuals regardless of race, colour, ancestry, ethnic origin, religion, socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical or mental ability, or political beliefs. The letter and spirit of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the *B. C. Human Rights Acts* and the *VSB/VTF Collective Agreement* shall be carefully observed, enforced, and supported, so that all members of the school community may work together in an atmosphere of respect and tolerance for individual differences.

The Board will ensure that the confidentiality of the sexual orientation and gender identity of staff will be protected. Employees who are out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or transitioning to another gender will be given the support they require to do their work in a safe and respectful environment.

Glossary

Gay: a man who is romantically and sexually attracted to other men. It is sometimes used to refer to the general GLBTQ community, but most often refers to just gay men.

Lesbian: a woman who is romantically and sexually attracted to other women. This term originates with the female poet Sappho who lived in a community comprised predominantly of women on the Isle of Lesbos in ancient Greece.

Bisexual: generally used to describe people who are romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of more than one sex or gender.

Sex & Gender: It is easy to confuse these two concepts and terms; however, they are different. Sex refers to the biological sex of a person. Gender refers to their societal appearance, mannerisms, and roles.

Transgender: an umbrella term used to refer to people who transcend the traditional concept of gender. Many feel as though they are neither a man nor a woman specifically, and many feel as though their biological sex (male, female, etc.) and their socialized gender (man, woman, etc.) don't match up. Some opt to change/reassign their sex through hormones and/or surgery and some change their outward appearance, or gender expression, through clothing, hairstyles, mannerisms, etc.

Transvestite: More appropriately referred to as "cross-dressing," the term transvestite most often refers to males who dress in the clothing of women. The term drag usually refers to dressing in the clothing and styles of another gender for entertainment purposes.

Transsexual: used to describe those individuals who use hormone therapy and/or surgery to alter their sex.

Two-Spirit: used by some First Nations to describe people in their culture who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

Questioning: People who are in the process of questioning their sexual orientation are often in need of support and understanding during this stage of their identity. They are seeking information and guidance in their self-discovery.

Ally: an individual who is supportive of the GLBTQ community. They believe in the dignity and respect of all people, and are willing to stand up in that role.

Homosexual: a scientific term invented in the 1800's to refer to individuals who are sexually attracted to their own sex/gender.

Heterosexual: created around the same time as 'homosexual' to describe individuals who are sexually attracted to the opposite sex/gender.

Straight: a slang word used to refer to the heterosexual members of our community.

Heterosexism and Homophobia: The term heterosexism refers to the assumption that all people are heterosexual and that heterosexuality is superior and more desirable than homosexuality. "Homophobia" is defined as "the irrational fear and hatred of homosexuals." Both of these are perpetuated by negative stereotypes and are dangerous to individuals and communities.

Genderism: refers to the assumption that one's gender identity or gender expression will conform to traditionally held stereotypes associated with one's biological sex.

Sexual Orientation: is a personal characteristic that covers the range of human sexuality from gay and lesbian, to bisexual, transgender and heterosexual orientations.

Gender Identity: A person's gender identity is the way in which they define and act on their gender. Gender Expression is how they express their gender.

Queer: The term queer has a history of being used as a derogatory name for members of the GLBTQ (and Ally) community and those whose sexual orientation is perceived as such. Many people use this word in a positive way to refer to the community; they have reclaimed the term as their own. Not everyone believes this and sensitivity should be used when using or hearing it as there are still many negative connotations with its use.

(These definitions were assembled by Sarah E. Holmes (GLBTQA Resources Coordinator from 2000-2002) in August 2000, revised by Andrew J. Shepard in November 2000, updated again by Sarah August 2002. <http://www.usm.maine.edu/glbqtqa/definitions.htm> University of Southern Maine Safe Zone Project.)

Cross Refs:

ACA* Multiculturalism and Anti-Racism

FB Facilities Planning

GBAB* Employment Equity

GBCBA* Sexual Harassment

IGBA Programs for Disabled Students

IIA Instructional Materials

IIAE* Hate Crimes and Propaganda

JB Equal Educational Opportunities

KLB Public Complaints about the Curriculum/Instructional Materials