

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

April 13, 2011

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Trustee D. Colburn, ASBA Issues and Resolutions Committee  
Trustee S. Hoffman, Chair ASBA Issues and Resolutions Committee  
Trustee C. Johner, ASBA Issues and Resolutions Committee

SUBJECT: Proposed Issue for the ASBA 2011 Policy Process

RESOURCE  
STAFF: Tanni Parker, Anne Sherwood, Rosalind Smith, Kris Wells

RECOMMENDATION

That submission of the following Directive for Action, as detailed in Appendix I, for submission to ASBA Zone 23 be approved:

Directive for Action: That the Alberta School Boards Association develop a policy advisory to assist school boards in supporting the specialized health, safety, and learning needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-identified, and two-spirit (LGBT) students and employees in Alberta schools.

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The ASBA Issues and Resolutions Committee requested the Administration to submit suggested policy issues for consideration at the ASBA 2011 Fall General meeting. In keeping with the Board's initiative to support the specialized health, safety, and learning needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-identified, and two-spirit (LGBT) students and employees, the administration suggested a corollary resolution for the ASBA to provide policy support in this area for other boards. The ASBA Issues and Resolutions Committee is recommending the Board approve a proposed directive for action that the ASBA develop a policy advisory to assist school boards in this regard.

Attached as Appendix I is the proposed resolution and supporting documentation for submission to ASBA Zone 23 for consideration. Each zone reviews submissions from zone member boards and submits its recommended resolutions for the Fall Annual General meeting. ASBA Zone 23 can submit up to 6 resolutions.

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APPENDIX I – Background Material Supporting Recommended Directives for Action for the ASBA

**DIRECTIVE FOR ACTION: CALL FOR SCHOOL BOARD POLICY DIRECTIVES TO SUPPORT THE SPECIALIZED HEALTH, SAFETY, AND LEARNING NEEDS OF LGBTT STUDENTS AND EMPLOYEES**

That the Alberta School Boards Association develop a policy advisory to assist school boards in supporting the specialized health, safety, and learning needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-identified, and two-spirit students and employees in Alberta schools.

**Background**

The Public Health Agency of Canada indicates “that experiences of discrimination, stigmatization, violence, and the associated negative mental health outcomes disproportionately impact the physical, emotional, and educational lives of sexual minority youth” (2010, p. 3). Correspondingly, the Suicide Prevention Resource Centre reports that sexual minority youth are 1.5 to 7 times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers. Likewise researchers at the University of Calgary found that gay male and bisexual youth in Alberta were 13.9 times more at risk for suicide attempts than their heterosexual peers. A 2007 study from the McCreary Centre in British Columbia also found that lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth, when compared to their heterosexual peers, were more likely to:

- have experienced physical and sexual abuse, harassment in school, and discrimination in the community;
- have run away from home once or more in the past year;
- be current smokers, tried alcohol, or used other drugs;
- report emotional stress, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts;
- participate less frequently in sports and physical activity, and report higher levels of computer usage/time; and
- feel less cared about by parents and less connected to their families (Wells, 2009).

In terms of direct violence, a recent survey from the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics revealed that gay, lesbian, and bisexual adults experienced higher rates of violent victimization including sexual assault, robbery, and physical assault and rates of discrimination three times higher than heterosexuals. Statistics Canada found that the majority of hate crimes involve young people (under the age of 25), both as the perpetrators and victims of hate crimes. Only one in ten hate crimes are ever reported to authorities.

Overall, this body of research evidence clearly indicates that sexual minority youth often encounter multiple risk factors, have fewer protective factors (such as a sense of connectedness to school and family), and experience more bullying, harassment, alienation, suicide ideation, and substance abuse than do their heterosexual peers. Over a decade of research evidence identifies how educational institutions have a legal, ethical, and professional responsibility to respond appropriately to the urgent health, safety, and educational needs of sexual minority youth (Wells, 2009).

In 2008, in an effort to address these considerable risk factors, the Alberta Government became the first government in Canada to name homophobic bullying as an educational concern and to create print and web-based resources to assist students, parents, coaches, and teachers in creating safe, inclusive, and welcoming environments for students who are, or who are perceived to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-identified, or two-spirited (LGBTT).

In Alberta, all publicly funded school districts have a legally mandated responsibility to provide discrimination-free educational environments. This positive duty includes a proactive, rather than reactive strategy when responding to incidents of bullying, harassment, and discrimination against sexual minority students. For example, Courts have indicated that a school district must do more than implement a progressive disciplinary strategy to respond to complaints as they arise, rather school districts should work proactively to address a pervasive school-wide culture of homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism. This “proactive duty” means that specific LGBTT-inclusive policies ought to be developed, supporting programs and services established, professional development and in-service opportunities provided, and appropriate financial and human resources assigned to ensure that these efforts are effective and meaningfully communicated to all members of the school community.

Contemporary research demonstrates that vulnerable minority groups have needs and concerns that are seldom effectively addressed by broad “catch all” policies. For example, many school boards now have specific Aboriginal and multiculturalism policies to reflect the changing needs and diverse realities of their communities. A specific LGBTT policy and accompanying regulations are necessary to help provide teachers and administrators with the necessary knowledge, strategies, and resources to create safe, caring, equitable, and inclusive learning environments for sexual minority students and employees. In addition, these policies also provide important support for heterosexual students who may come from same-sex parented families. Importantly, the development of specific policy and regulations will also create recommended actions and outcomes from which progress can be measured and evaluated. Ultimately, these policies create important benchmarks from which to gauge a district’s progress in creating safe, equitable, and inclusive learning environments for all students and employees regardless of their actual or perceived differences. However and perhaps most importantly, as an invisible minority, a standalone policy visibly signals to the LGBTT community that they are a valued and respected part of our school communities.

### **ASBA’s Vision, Mission, Mandate, and Guiding Principles**

This suggested directive is consistent with the vision, mission, mandate, and guiding principles of the Association, which are in keeping with the following policy statements:

- ASBA believes “the K-12 curriculum should reflect a strong human rights emphasis”.
- ASBA supports a “vision for public education”, which is founded on the commitment to “educate all children well”.
- ASBA supports a “comprehensive approach to health and learning in schools and school systems”.

These tenets of ASBA’s foundational beliefs are also supported by the following legal, legislative, and policy frameworks.

## Existing Policy and Legislative Framework to Support Implementation

### *Alberta School Act – Section 45(8)*

“A Board shall ensure that each student enrolled in a school operated by the board is provided with a safe and caring environment that fosters and maintains respectful and responsible behaviours.”

### *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*

**15.** (1) Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the 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.

\*Sexual orientation is considered by the Supreme Court of Canada to be an analogous grounds of protection to the other characteristics listed in Section 15 of the Charter.

### *Alberta Human Rights Act*

WHEREAS it is recognized in Alberta as a fundamental principle and as a matter of public policy that all persons are equal in: dignity, rights and responsibilities without regard to race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status or sexual orientation

## **Alberta Teachers’ Association – CURRENT DIRECTIVES**

**18.B.7** BE IT RESOLVED, that the Alberta Teachers’ Association **urge the Department of Education to require school boards to develop policy and procedures for dealing with discrimination** on the basis of race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical characteristics, disability, marital status, family status, age, ancestry, place of origin, place of residence, socioeconomic background or linguistic background. [1998/2001/04/07/10]

**18.B.21** BE IT RESOLVED, that the Alberta Teachers' Association urge Alberta school boards to develop **district policies** that specifically address the health and safety of **lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-identified students**, as well as those who are perceived as such. [2006/09]

**18.B.22** BE IT RESOLVED, that the Alberta Teachers' Association urge Alberta school boards to develop **district policies** that specifically address the health, safety and employment concerns of **lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-identified staff**, as well as those who are perceived as such. [2006/09]

## Supporting Educational Resources

### **Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities** ([www.sacsc.ca](http://www.sacsc.ca))

- Creating Safe, Caring, and Inclusive Schools for LGBTTT Students: A Guide for School District Leaders
- Creating Safe and Caring Schools for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Trans-Identified Students: A Guide for Counsellors

- Safe Spaces Initiative (Poster, Brochure, Sticker)
- Creating Safe and Caring Schools for Lesbian and Gay Youth: A Guide for Teachers
- Dealing With Homophobia: Resources for School Communities in Alberta – Resource Kit

### **Alberta Teachers' Association**

- **Professional Development Workshop Series**  
Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (1): Exploring the Issues  
Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (2): Examining Prejudice, Power and Privilege  
Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (3): Taking Action to Create Safe Schools
- Gay-Straight Student Alliances in Alberta Schools: A Guide for Teachers
- Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Educational Website ([www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca) - look under Issues in Education; Diversity, Equity & Human Rights)

### **Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta** ([www.iSMSS.ualberta.ca](http://www.iSMSS.ualberta.ca))

- Research Brief on Sexual Minority Youth Health, Wellness, and Safety Concerns
- Camp fYrefly: LGBTT youth leadership program ([www.fYrefly.ualberta.ca](http://www.fYrefly.ualberta.ca))

### **References**

- Public Health Agency of Canada. (2010). Questions & Answers: Sexual orientation in schools. Author: Ottawa, ON. ISBN: 978-1-100-15119-9*
- Wells, K. (2009). Research exploring the health, wellness, and safety concerns of sexual minority youth. Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality [SIECCAN Newsletter], 43(1-2), 221-229.*