



Inspiring all learners to become confident, collaborative and ethical citizens motivated with a passion to achieve a sustainable future.

## Frequently Asked Questions

Alberta Education's *Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Gender Expressions*, and the resulting PWSD Policy IHF – *Safe and Caring Learning Environment*



### Introduction

In response to the [\*Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Gender Expressions\*](#), issued by Alberta Education, the Board and Policy Review Committee at Peace Wapiti Public School Division (PWSD) have developed [\*Policy IHF – Safe and Caring Learning Environment\*](#).

To read the *Guidelines* and PWSD's *Policy IHF*, please click the links provided above or visit the PWSD website at [www.pwpsd76.ab.ca](http://www.pwpsd76.ab.ca). Many people may have questions and concerns about how the new *Guidelines* will impact their school community. The list of Frequently Asked Questions provided on page 2 will help clarify misinformation and provide facts.

### Terms of reference

- **Guidelines:** Refers to the document issued by Alberta Education, *Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learning Environments that Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Gender Expressions*
- **LGBTQ:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning
- **Transgender:** Consistently expressing a gender identity that does not align with the gender assigned at birth.
- **Transgender girls:** Children who were assigned the sex of male at birth, but who consistently identify as female.
- **Transgender boys:** Children who were assigned the sex of female at birth, but who consistently identify as male.

For frequently asked questions, see page 2.

# Frequently Asked Questions



## Why have special guidelines and policies been created?

Alarming statistics published in 2010 indicate that 47 per cent of transgendered youth in Ontario had thought about suicide and 19 percent had attempted suicide in the preceding year (Scanlon, Travers, Coleman, Bauer, & Boyce, 2010). LGBTQ youth are four times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2009). PWSD's *Policy IHF* will support safe learning environments for LGBTQ and transgender students.

## I have heard that the *Guidelines* will take away my right as a parent to know if my child is identifying as LGBTQ or transgender while at school. Is this the case?

If parents want to know about their child's gender identity or sexual orientation, they should have that conversation with their child.

The Code of Professional Conduct and Bill 10 provide legal frameworks that prevent teachers from outing students to anyone, including their parents. However, when a student shares personal thoughts with a PWSD school staff member, they will work with the student regarding opening up to a close family member and seeking their support. PWSD schools also regularly access the services of outside agencies and can recommend family counseling, outside of the school setting.

## Is it true that a student can simply identify as the opposite gender, and then immediately have access to the washroom and change room of their choice?

No. A student who consistently identifies as transgender, and who expresses a desire to access the washroom and change room facilities that correspond with their gender identity, will do so in consultation with school staff. As a first option, any student requesting alternate washroom and change room facilities will be offered the use of a gender-neutral washroom and private change room.

## I have heard that the *Guidelines* will prevent school staff from using gender-based pronouns such as *him* and *her*, and *mother* and *father*. Is this true?

Students who wish to be referred to as *him* or *her*, or *he* or *she* will continue to be identified as such. However, if a transgender student requests something other, it will also be respected. Student may refer to their parents in the pronouns they are comfortable with using at home (e.g. *mother* and *father*). School-based communications will recognize that not all families include a mother and a father, and will therefore use more inclusive terms such as *parents* or *guardians*, to include all types of family structures, such as single parents, foster families, LGBTQ parents and step-families.

## Will transgender girls be permitted to play on girls' sports teams?

The Alberta Schools' Athletics Association already allows for this in its policy handbook. Students who consistently identify as transgender, and who wish to play on the team that aligns with their gender identity, may do so after considerable consultation with school staff.

There have been instances where female student-athletes have joined typically all-male sports teams (e.g. football). In some small schools, co-ed teams exist due to low enrolment numbers. In both cases, students are accommodated and adequately supervised when traveling for tournaments.

Thank you for reviewing the information provided in this newsletter. PWSD's *Policy IHF – Safe and Caring Learning Environment* received approval in principle at the Board meeting on March 17, 2016, and will be submitted to Alberta Education for review by March 31, 2016. Final approval will be granted once the policy has been vetted by the Minister's office and the Board has shared it with its stakeholders.