



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

### **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 these Guidelines to help School Divisions establish 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 of the Minister of Education, our Board believes that supporting vulnerable students is the right thing to do. Creating focused Policies or Procedures to protect vulnerable groups is a commonly-used strategy in schools. All HFCRD schools strive to build inclusive communities where respect for one another, our community and our diversity are celebrated.

Statistics show 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 now going to be substantially different in HFCRD schools?**

No. We believe every person shares the same rights and dignity and are called to live as God’s children. Every person deserves to feel welcome, safe, included and respected in our schools. The school experience in HFCRD 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 student success in a Catholic community guided by Christ.

### **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 our schools provide 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?**

Catholic schools are places of both learning and believing. In the eyes of the church, every human person is a unique and irreplaceable gift created by our loving God. The schools have a mission to help students grow as children of God in all aspects of their person: physically, academically, socially, morally and spiritually.

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

No. We will not be eliminating gender-specific bathrooms. The Guidelines recommend that every school provides a gender-neutral bathroom, or access to bathrooms that fit their consistently-asserted gender, where possible.

Students 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 situation is rare, 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 in every school.

As has been our practice, adult visitors to schools, during the school day, will be directed to use the staff bathrooms rather than student bathrooms.

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

The Guidelines refer to using alternate pronouns, but there is no directive to eliminate gender-specific pronouns. Neither is there a directive to stop referring to mothers or fathers.

## **Are sports teams going to 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. Our school sports teams are guided by Alberta Schools Athletic Association as per <http://www.asaa.ca/resources/asaa-bylaws-policy> see page 41.

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

The Guidelines identify that privacy is an essential right of children. Schools recognize the right of parents/guardians 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/guardians as appropriate to ensure the student has the support needed and that parents/guardians are aware of the need for support. However we are bounded by the FOIP Act to keep any information that a student requests to be confidential from their parents/guardians unless keeping the information confidential could create more harm for the student.

## **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 Division remains committed to providing ALL STUDENTS with a respectful learning environment. This issue will continue to be the topic of discussion at staff meetings and relevant training and support will be provided to 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 the previously referenced pieces of legislation.