

Introduction and Context

All schools should be places where all our children feel welcomed and safe. When students are included rather than excluded, welcomed and affirmed rather than marginalized, bullied, harassed, or made to feel invisible because of their gender identity or gender expression or any other aspect of who they are, they tend to flourish.

Manitoba Education and Training developed the guidelines in this support document to ensure that *transgender* and *gender diverse* students have equitable access to all aspects of school life (academic, extracurricular, and social) in ways that preserve and protect their dignity.

The education system in Manitoba is committed to fair and equitable participation and benefit by all people. The department and its school partners throughout Manitoba have worked diligently to make all our schools safer and more inclusive for all students. This resource will serve to enhance the work of school leaders, administrators, teachers, students, and parents/guardians in making schools safe, respectful, and equitable for all.*

Terminology

This document uses the words *transgender (trans)* and *gender diverse* to describe a wide range of people whose gender identities and/or gender expressions differ from what is typically associated with their assigned biological sex. Specific individuals may or may not identify as trans or gender diverse, and may prefer to identify themselves using different terms (see [Glossary](#)).

Purpose

Schools should be places where all children feel welcomed and safe. School administrators, educators, staff, parents/guardians, and students each play an important part in creating and sustaining a safe and supportive school environment.

“I don’t want to be just someone wearing a costume. I want to be me”
(trans youth, quoted in Sheldon and Krop).

* It is recognized that each school or school division may seek its own legal counsel with respect to the guidelines set out in this document.



This resource is intended to support schools and school boards in fulfilling a shared responsibility to promote the dignity, respect, and equity of trans and gender diverse students. The guidelines are designed to support trans and gender diverse students by

- respecting their human rights, to enable the free and full expression of their identity
- ensuring their well-being, full participation, success, and achievement
- involving their parents/guardians and families as key partners in their development when and where possible
- highlighting areas to consider when developing school policy and practice to create safe and caring environments for learning, free from bullying and discrimination
- increasing the awareness and capacity of divisional and school staff in supporting gender diversity in the school community

The Challenge

“I was tormented all the way until I was in the ninth grade (transgendered male-to-female youth, age 22 years)” (quoted in National Aboriginal Health Organization 8).

To progress academically and developmentally, all students need a safe and supportive school environment. Unfortunately, many trans students do not feel safe at school. As reported in the study *Every Class in Every School: First National Climate Survey on Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia in Canadian Schools* (Taylor et al.), trans and gender diverse students often struggle to find safe and caring school environments. The study, which involved surveying over 3700 students from across Canada between December 2002 and June 2009, found that

90% of trans youth hear transphobic comments daily or weekly from other students and almost a quarter (**23%**) of trans students reported hearing teachers use transphobic language daily or weekly. Almost three-quarters (**74%**) of trans students reported being verbally harassed about their gender expression.

A quarter (**25%**) of trans students reported having been physically harassed

44% of trans students reported being likely to miss school because of feeling unsafe and **15%** reported having skipped more than 10 days because of feeling unsafe at school. (Taylor et al. 23)

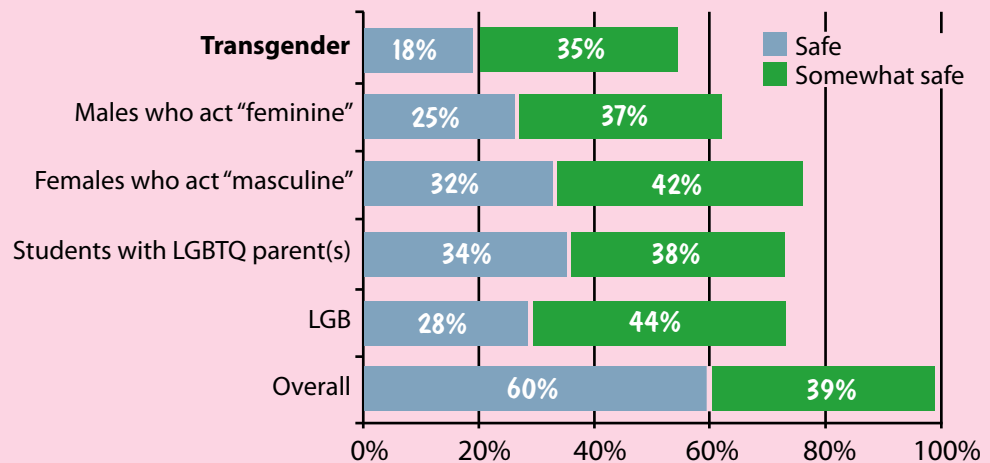


“The student Climate Survey showed that transgender students are even more likely to be harassed and feel unsafe at school than LGB students; the Every Teacher survey showed that most teachers felt that transgender students would not feel safe in their schools” (Taylor et al., *The Every Teacher Project* 156).

Lack of awareness or understanding and/or societal prejudice result in many trans and gender diverse students experiencing ongoing rejection, criticism, or bullying. In addition, they may not have access to appropriate supports and services, all of which may have a significant impact on their health, well-being, and academic achievement.

“Almost all educators (97%) considered their school to be safe but when they were asked questions that focus on the safety of LGBTQ students the numbers dropped substantially, especially for transgender students [see chart below]. LGBTQ participants and FNMI [First Nations, Métis, and Inuit] or other racialized participants were even more likely than CH [cisgender heterosexual] or White participants to see their schools as unsafe for LGBTQ students” (Taylor et al., *The Every Teacher Project* 17).

Educators’ Perceptions of School Safety*



* **Source:** Taylor, Catherine, Tracey Peter, Christopher Campbell, Elizabeth Meyer, Janice Ristock, and Donn Short. *The Every Teacher Project on LGBTQ-Inclusive Education in Canada's K-12 Schools: Final Report*. Winnipeg, MB: The Manitoba Teachers' Society, 2015. 27. Reproduced with permission.



The 2015 report *Being Safe, Being Me: Results of the Canadian Trans Youth Health Survey* (Veale et al.) provides evidence of the effects of social exclusion and lack of appropriate supports and services for trans children and youth. The report provides a summary of the findings of a national online survey conducted by researchers from several Canadian universities and community organizations. The survey included 923 trans participants from all 10 provinces and one of the territories. Trans youth were asked about a wide range of life experiences and behaviours that influence their own and other youth's health.

The participating youth reported serious concerns:

Many of these youth face rejection, discrimination and even violence, within their families, at school or work, in their community, and in health care settings. They report significant stress and mental health challenges, a profound lack of safety in navigating their daily lives, barriers to supportive health care, and worrying rates of poverty. (Veale et al. 69)

The report also found hope:

When young people felt cared about, they reported much lower levels of distress and better health. Trans youth, like all youth, need the support and care of family, friends, school staff, and other professionals, to reach their full potential as healthy adults. (Veale et al. 69)

Other jurisdictions report similar research findings, and these experiences are not limited solely to high school students. Students in Early and Middle Years schools may also experience significant transphobia.

The results of these national and international studies and surveys are clear, and may be summarized as follows:

- Educational supports are needed to help trans and gender diverse students move from feeling at risk to developing the resilience necessary to adapt to often hostile and unwelcoming school, family, and community environments.
- Despite the risk factors, many trans and gender diverse youth learn to develop protective strategies and personal resilience in the face of daily adversity.
- Trans and gender diverse students, in spite of some improvements, often face extremely hostile and discriminatory school environments.
- Trans and gender diverse students have poorer educational outcomes, report less attachment to their school environment, and identify far greater experiences of harassment, homelessness, discrimination, and verbal, physical, and sexual abuse and assault than their cisgender peers, regardless of sexual orientation.



The authors of *Being Safe, Being Me* concluded that “Schools need to become safer and more welcoming for trans youth, even before youth make themselves known to school staff. Schools and school districts should work with trans youth, parents of trans youth, trans community leaders, and professionals to develop effective policies and programs that create supportive school environments” (Veale et al. 69).

Document Content and Organization

The [Guidelines for Supporting and Affirming Trans and Gender Diverse Students](#) form the core of this document. The guidelines are intended to help school divisions and schools, with the involvement of parents/guardians, to develop their own policies and protocols to promote respect for and equity of trans and gender diverse students in safe, caring, and inclusive schools and learning environments.

The sections surrounding the guidelines include discussions of the Manitoba legal and policy framework, understanding trans and gender diverse identities and gender expressions, creating affirming schools for all, and planning for and implementing gender transitioning in schools. This document also includes information on related support services, an annotated list of selected print and online resources, and a glossary defining many of the terms used within this resource. A bibliography is also included.



Notes

