

Q&A

Manitoba Education and Training

Responses to Frequently Asked Questions about

Supporting TRANSGENDER & GENDER DIVERSE

Students in Manitoba Schools



Question: What type of document is this?

Answer: This is a support document, resource, or tool for Manitoba school divisions and schools to use if they wish. It provides information and guidelines that may be used by school divisions or schools to develop their own policies and protocols related to supporting transgender and gender diverse students. This support document was published by Manitoba Education and Training in August 2017. Topics covered include information on transgender and gender diverse children and youth, a discussion of the responsibilities of schools and other partners in education in creating safe and inclusive schools and classroom environments, and 11 guidelines for dealing with specific issues. This document is not a policy document that imposes specific requirements on schools, nor is it a curriculum document.

Question: Why was this document developed?

Answer: This document is one of several departmental initiatives intended to support school communities in providing safe learning environments for all students. All parents and guardians want schools to provide welcoming, safe, respectful, and caring environments for their own and other people's children.

Research has shown that inclusive school environments that welcome diversity provide safer, more effective, and healthier learning environments. As well, research and experience in Canada and beyond have shown that students of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are more likely than others to experience bullying and other forms of exclusion in school that often have very negative consequences for their academic learning and their mental and physical well-being.

Information on the impact of bullying and exclusion in schools on children and youth is available from PREVNet (Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network) at www.prevnet.ca/. PREVNet is a national network of leading researchers and organizations working together to address bullying in Canada.

Question: Why is this document important?

Answer: The human rights legislation in Manitoba and Canada protects citizens, including transgender and gender diverse persons, from discrimination. This legislation applies to all service providers, including schools. Information on Manitoba's *Human Rights Code* and this topic may be found in The Manitoba Human Rights Commission's document *Discrimination Based on Gender Identity: Your Rights, Your Responsibilities: A Guideline Developed under The Human Rights Code* (2016), available at www.manitobahumanrights.ca/v1/education-resources/resources/gender-identity.html.

An increasing number of transgender and gender diverse students in schools throughout Manitoba and Canada require appropriate educational supports. This document is a response to school divisions, schools, parents/guardians, and students who have asked Manitoba Education and Training for help and requested that a provincial support document be developed to help them meet their obligations to provide a safe and caring school environment for all students.

Question: How was this document developed?

Answer: This document is the result of two years of research and consultation. The development team looked at similar documents from across Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, as well as educational papers and research on the subject.

Two formal consultations were held in the development of this document. One consultation was held with youth-serving agencies and experts, and the other with representatives of provincial education organizations. Both groups were presented with a draft of this document. The response from both consultation groups was very positive and supportive of developing such a document.

Question: Do other provinces have similar documents?

Answer: Manitoba's document builds on research, developments, and experience in Canada and other nations. The core of this document builds on other similar documents, including the Canadian Teachers' Federation's *Supporting Transgender and Transsexual Students in K–12 Schools: A Guide for Educators* (2012) and Nova Scotia's *Guidelines for Supporting Transgender and Gender-nonconforming Students* (2014). More recently, Alberta Education published *Guidelines for Best Practices: Creating Learning Environments That Respect Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Gender Expressions* (2016).

The Manitoba guidelines for supporting transgender and gender diverse students are consistent with those developed in many school divisions and schools in Canada, including some faith-based schools. They reflect the current standards of practice and are consistent with human rights legislation in Manitoba, Canada, and other democratic countries.

Question: How will this document affect schools?

Answer: Manitoba Education and Training recognizes that the legal and societal contexts are changing, and that they affect schools and the standards of practice. The department, school divisions, schools, students, and parents/guardians are all involved in a learning process.

The department expects that as school divisions and schools work with students and parents/guardians in developing their local policies, protocols, and guidelines, we will learn from these experiences, and this will inform our future work in the province.

Some school divisions and schools already have existing policies, protocols, and guidelines that align with this provincial document. Others are developing them or will develop them in the future.

Question: Where can I find more information about this document and other Safe and Caring Schools resources?

Answer: This document and other Safe and Caring Schools resources and initiatives are available on the Manitoba Education and Training website at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/safe_schools/index.html.