

Advocating Schools That Care for LGBT Students, Teachers and Parents: Writing to Your Provincial Minister of Education

Introduction

It is our goal to have as many LGBT persons, parents of LGBT and Questioning youth, and supporters of LGBT equality write letters to their provincial (or territorial) Minister of Education. We need to call upon all ministers to ensure that all publicly funded schools and boards develop and enforce policies against homophobic bullying and harassment. Furthermore, we need to ensure schools teach LGBT friendly curriculum material, and create supportive environments for LGBT and questioning students, teachers, other school workers, parents and families.

Points to Consider Including In Your Letter:

1. Acknowledge progress in implementation of existing policies or curricula, which respect cultural, racial and religious diversity. Make sure to also note that progress has not been made concerning sexual orientation, gender identity and family diversity.
2. All publicly supported schools (not just public schools) must have and enforce policies against homophobic bullying and harassment, and age appropriate curricula on family diversity, sexual orientation and gender identity.
3. If possible, share personal experiences in which you or someone close to you has experienced homophobic and transphobic bullying or harassment.
4. Curriculum needs:

Younger grades: Two men or two women may form loving and caring relationships and children may have two mommies or two daddies.

Older grades: Learning about different forms of oppression (including homophobia) and the harmful effects of negative stereotyping. Understanding how to protect themselves and others from STDs and HIV. Choosing suitable partners. It is essential to teach about measures responsible people take to protect themselves and others including, but not limited to abstinence.

5. Formation of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) in high schools is necessary to promote safe, caring and accepting schools.

6. Schools need “out” LGBT teachers and staff members as responsible role models.

7. Teaching about diversity of families and sexual orientations is not “teaching homosexuality”, but recognizing a reality in school communities and society.

8. Schools exist to break down ignorance and promote knowledge including on matters of human sexuality, therefore publicly funded religious schools should be required to teach curriculum content covering Queer issues and family diversity.

9. Complete education is a right of all students. Parents, have the right to be informed on curriculum content covering Queer issues and family diversity but should not be allowed to withdraw children from classes on these issues based upon religious or cultural objections.



A Sample Letter

The following is a copy of a letter sent by a member of Egale's Education Committee to the Minister of Education in Alberta:

It is a sign of positive progress that most school boards have policies to deal with most kinds of discrimination, bullying and harassment that result from racism, religious bias and sexism. This is good, but not good enough. It remains a sad fact that many school boards have not developed policies and procedures to deal with acts of discrimination, bullying and harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The result of this is a higher dropout rate and suicide rate among Lesbian, Gay male, Bisexual and Trans-identified (LGBT) youth, as well as youth who are questioning their sexuality. The fact remains that schools are not safe and caring for anybody unless they are safe and caring for everybody.

It is essential for you, as Minister of Education, to ensure that all publicly supported schools and school systems have policies in effect to deal with homophobic bullying and harassment, ensuring schools are safe, accepting and welcoming for LGBT students, teachers, other school workers and parents. Furthermore, it is essential that school health and... curricula include age appropriate information on family diversity, human sexuality that includes accurate information on homosexuality, and that corrects stereotypes and misinformation on these topics. Finally, it is essential that LGBT and questioning students who seek support from high school guidance counselors on sexuality issues will find support and assistance that will encourage them to live their sexuality responsibly. Schools must do everything to ensure young people, whether heterosexual or homosexual, will see their sexuality as gifts and be able to protect themselves from exploitation.

Of course, treatment of these topics must be age appropriate. In younger grades, there are students who have two mommies or two daddies. Students need to be taught that this is okay and that two men or two women may form loving and caring relationships with each other. In older grades, topics of study must include understanding the roots of different forms

of oppression, help students to learn strategies to respond wisely and protect themselves from incidents of bullying, protection from all forms of STDs and HIV, and choice of suitable partners. While junior and senior high school students must be encouraged to abstain from premature sexual activity, we must recognize that if teaching abstinence were adequate, we would not have young people who are prematurely pregnant or being treated for STDs. Therefore it is essential to teach about other measures responsible people take to protect themselves and their sexual partners.

Formation of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) in high schools is necessary to encourage a safe, caring and accepting school environment in which the presence of LGBT students and teachers are seen as positive by other students and teachers. Furthermore, schools need to have "out" LGBT teachers and staff members who live their lives and sexuality in ways that are caring and responsible.

Finally... there are questions on whether parents should be permitted to withdraw their children from classes dealing with all aspects of human sexuality, including homosexuality, and whether religious based schools, including Catholic schools, should be required to include information on homosexuality, family diversity and same-sex marriage in health... courses.

It must be noted that we already teach respect for religious and cultural diversity. LGBT folk come from all religious and cultural backgrounds, even those that may condemn homosexuality. We teach children and youth, not just about diversity, but to respect diversity because good teachers know respect is essential to breaking down ignorance. Contrary to claims by those who oppose any kind of LGBT favourable content, teaching respect and implementing policies to stop bullying and harassment of people from diverse sexual orientations or families is not "teaching homosexuality", but recognizing there are diverse families as well as LGBT students, teachers and others in our school communities (as well as society as a whole). These are facts about society and we do not change the facts by ignoring them or denying they exist.

A Sample Letter

Since schools exist to break dividing walls of ignorance, it is essential that all students have the right to learn about diverse families and sexualities just as we expect all students to learn about diverse cultures, religions and literature. Therefore, to protect the rights of students, I believe it is essential for you to direct that all publicly funded schools be required to include this content in health, language arts and social studies curricula. Furthermore, while parents must have the right to know the course content on these issues, they should not have the right to withdraw their children from classes covering these subjects.

Letter Writing Hints:

1. Do not simply make a list of demands, but give reasons for any suggestions you make.
2. Cover only those topics with which you are personally comfortable.

Write any letter in your own style. Do not copy a letter someone else has sent and attach your name to it.

Keep letters to two pages or less in length.

Send copies of your letter to the Leaders of Opposition parties or party critics on education policies.

Be prepared to follow up any reply from the Minister if necessary. It is particularly important to challenge any statement that is negative to LGBT people or that is clearly inaccurate.

Encourage others to write letters as well.

Who to write to:

Ministers of Education

British Columbia:

The Honourable Shirley Bond, Minister of Education,
PO Box 9045, STN PROV GOVT, Victoria, BC V8W
9E2 Phone: (250) 387-1977 Fax: (250) 387-3200

Alberta:

The Honourable Ronald Liepert, Minister of Education,
323 Legislature Building, 10800 - 97 Avenue,
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6 Phone: (780) 427-5010 Fax:
(780) 427-5018

Saskatchewan:

The Honourable Deb Higgins, Minister of Learning,
Room 307 Legislative Building, Regina, SK S4S 0B3
Phone: (306) 787-7137 Fax: (306) 787-0237 Email:
minister.lrn@gov.sk.ca

Manitoba:

The Honourable Peter Bjornson, Minister of Education,
Citizenship and Youth, 168 Legislative Building, 450
Broadway, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3C 0V8 Phone:
(204) 945-3720 Fax: (204) 945-1291

Ontario:

The Honourable Kathleen Wynne, Minister of
Education, Mowat Block, 900 Bay Street, Toronto, ON
M7A 1L2 Phone: (416) 425-6777

Quebec:

Michelle Courchesne, La ministre de l'Éducation, du
Loisir et du Sport, Édifice Marie-Guyart, 1035 rue De
La Chevrotière, 16e étage, Québec, QC G1R5A5
Phone: (418) 644-0664 Fax: (418) 646-7551

Prince Edward Island:

The Honourable Mildred A. Dover, Minister of
Education, Second Floor, Sullivan Building, 16 Fitzroy
Street, P.O. Box 2000, Charlottetown, PEI C1A 7N8
Phone: (902) 368-4600 Fax: (902) 368-4663

New Brunswick:

The Honourable Kelly Lamrock, Minister of Education,
Place 2000, P.O. Box 6000, Fredericton, NB E3B 5H1
Phone: (506) 453-3678 Fax: (506) 453-3325

Nova Scotia:

The Honourable Karen Casey, Minister of Education,
P.O. Box 578, 2021 Brunswick Street, Halifax, NS B3J
2S9 Phone: (902) 424-5168 Fax: (902) 424-0511

Newfoundland:

The Honourable Joan Burke, Minister of Education,
P.O. Box 8700, St. John's, NL A1B 4J6 Phone: (709)
729-5097 Fax: (709) 729-5896

Yukon:

The Honourable Patrick Rouble, Minister of Education,
Yukon Legislative Assembly, Box 2703, Whitehorse,
Yukon Y1A 2C6 Phone: (867) 667-8661 Fax: (867)
393-7400 Email: patrick.rouble@gov.yk.ca

Northwest

Territories: The Honourable Charles Dent, Minister of
Education, P.O. Box 1320, Yellowknife, NT X1A 2L9
Phone: (867) 669-2366 Fax: (867) 873-0169 Email:
charles_dent@gov.nt.ca

Nunavut:

The Honourable Ed Picco, Minister of Education, P.O.
Box 1000, Iqaluit, NU, X0A 0H0 Phone: (867) 975-
5600 Fax: (867) 975-5605

Mr. Boyd Pelley,

Director, Council of Ministers of Education, Canada,
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