

MASS **Journal**

Fall 2016

The official magazine of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents



LGBTQ **– Everyone** **is Welcome in** **our Schools**





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MASS Journal

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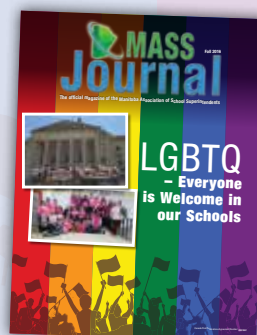
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On the cover: In her article on page 14, Catherine Taylor and Tracey Peter discuss whether the long-standing freeze on LGBTQ-inclusive education in Canada has begun to thaw. They believe yes, and their article and the others in this issue of *The MASS Journal*, illustrate this confidence. This issue's cover shows students from Seven Oaks School Division (full article on page 30), and students from Hapnot Collegiate in Flin Flon (full article on page 36).



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While Public Education in Manitoba evolves in numerous ways, the steadfast commitment and the primary focus for educational leaders in Manitoba continues to be to ensure that ALL of our children's voices are heard and their fundamental rights are further strengthened. Our resolve to ensure that these rights are maintained and further enhanced must never waver.

As educators we take our direction from the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in this area. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the right for all, "...to equal protection and benefit before and under the law without discrimination based on race, ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability." Public School Boards, as with all governing bodies, are held to this standard. In Manitoba, Appropriate Education Act (2005) and Public Schools Amendment Act – Safe and Inclusive Schools (2013), are just two examples of relatively recent legislation that demonstrate our province's ongoing support for further addressing the issues around human rights in public education.

With the work of educators across the province in support of the LGTTBQ* community highlighted in this edition of *The MASS Journal*, along with the upcoming Educating for Action Conference – *Our Human Rights Journey*, co-sponsored by the Manitoba School Boards Association and the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS), it is clear that our continued actions as educational leaders are aligned with our commitment to the issue of equity and quality in public education.

As recent provincial data on the achievement of our indigenous students suggests, it is also clear that there is still much work to do. While we work collectively at exploring student data, using research to guide our practices and to support our teachers in their ongoing quest to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of their students, it is critical to be mindful of the importance of looking through the equity lens as we move forward. *Towards Equity in Education* is a report recently released by the Social Planning Council of Manitoba with support from MASS and our educational partners. It provides system leaders with information that can help them reflect on their ongoing work and to be more inclusive in their practice and policy development. The information within this report further shines a light on the importance of achieving a quality education for all.

As president of MASS, I am in awe of work of our membership as they embrace and celebrate the diverse communities they serve. And, while our members continue to do wonderful work in this regard, the simple fact is there will always be more work to be done. Canadian activist, Rosemary Brown's words should give us pause and provide guidance for those in public education: "Until all of us have made it, none of us have."

Brett Lough, President
Chief Superintendent
St. James-Assiniboia School Division



L'évolution de l'éducation publique au Manitoba est multiforme, mais le premier et le principal engagement des responsables de l'éducation au Manitoba demeurent : garantir que les voix de TOUS nos enfants sont entendues et que leurs droits fondamentaux s'en trouvent renforcés. Notre engagement à nous assurer que ces droits sont maintenus et renforcés doit être résolu et indéfectible.

En tant qu'éducateurs, nous nous inspirons à cet égard de la Charte canadienne des droits et libertés. La Charte des droits et libertés garantit que « [...] *tous ont droit à la même protection et au même bénéfice de la loi, indépendamment de toute discrimination, notamment des discriminations fondées sur la race, l'origine nationale ou ethnique, la couleur, la religion, le sexe, l'âge ou les déficiences mentales ou physiques* ». À l'instar de tous les organismes gouvernementaux, les commissions scolaires sont tenues de respecter cette norme. Au Manitoba, la *Loi sur les programmes d'éducation appropriés* (2005) et la *Loi modifiant la Loi sur les écoles publiques (milieux scolaires favorisant la sécurité et l'inclusion)* (2013) ne sont que deux exemples de dispositions législatives relativement récentes qui attestent que la province soutient plus que jamais les mesures pour aborder les problèmes des droits de la personne dans le domaine de l'éducation publique.

Dans le cadre de leur travail, les éducateurs de la province soutiennent la communauté LGTTBQ* comme le souligne ce numéro du *MASS Journal*, et comme en fera état la prochaine Conférence sur l'éducation par l'action – Notre périple dans les droits de la personne (Educating for Action Conference – *Our Human Rights Journey*) qu'organisent conjointement la Manitoba School Boards Association et la Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS). Il apparaît donc manifeste que nos actions soutenues comme responsables de l'éducation s'inscrivent dans le droit fil de notre engagement à l'égard de l'équité et de la qualité de l'éducation publique.

Comme du reste le laissent entendre les récentes statistiques provinciales sur la réussite de nos élèves autochtones, il est par ailleurs certain qu'il reste beaucoup à accomplir. Au moment où nous examinons collectivement les données sur les élèves et utilisons la recherche pour orienter nos pratiques et soutenir nos enseignants dans leurs efforts constants pour améliorer les compétences en alphabétisation et en numératie de leurs élèves, il est impératif de garder à l'esprit la perspective de l'équité tandis que nous allons de l'avant. Avec le soutien de la MASS et de nos partenaires en éducation, le Social Planning Council of Manitoba a récemment publié le rapport *Towards Equity in Education*. Ce document renseigne nos responsables scolaires sur les mesures susceptibles de les éclairer sur le travail qui se fait et les moyens à mettre en œuvre pour rendre plus inclusifs l'exercice de leur profession et les politiques élaborées. L'information que

Suite à la page 8



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Suite de la page 7

contient ce rapport met également en lumière l'importance d'une éducation de qualité pour tous et toutes.

En ma qualité de président de la MASS, je suis stupéfait du travail accompli par nos membres, tandis qu'ils oeuvrent dans les communautés diversifiées, les célèbrent et les servent avec passion. Par ailleurs, tandis que nos membres continuent d'accomplir à cet égard des prodiges, il convient de se rappeler qu'il y a encore beaucoup plus à accomplir. Les propos de l'activiste canadienne Rosemary Brown sont une source de réflexion et d'inspiration pour les personnes qui oeuvrent dans l'éducation publique : « Jusqu'à ce que nous ayons tous franchi la ligne d'arrivée, personne ne l'aura atteint ».

Brett Lough, Président et directeur général

Division scolaire St. James-Assiniboia



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On behalf of Manitoba's new government, I am pleased to acknowledge the important work being done by the members of the Manitoba Association of Superintendents (MASS) to promote quality education and ensure the well-being of students and schools across our province.

I am sure you agree that education paves the way to personal success and fulfillment in life. Investing in education not only moves individuals forward, personally and professionally, it also benefits our province today and for years to come.

Our government looks forward to working with your members, and other stakeholders, to develop a long-term literacy plan for Manitoba's children—a plan which will ensure Manitoba's students get the best education possible.

I commend you for your commitment to educational excellence and wish you continued success.

Honourable Ian Wishart

Minister of Manitoba Education and Training



Au nom du nouveau gouvernement du Manitoba, j'ai le plaisir de reconnaître l'important travail qu'effectuent les membres de la Manitoba Association of Superintendents (MASS) pour promouvoir une éducation de qualité et assurer le bien-être des élèves, ainsi que le bon état des établissements scolaires partout dans notre province.

Vous conviendrez avec moi, j'en suis sûr, que l'éducation prépare le terrain pour le succès personnel et l'accomplissement de soi. L'investissement en éducation

non seulement permet d'avancer sur le plan personnel et professionnel, il profite à notre province aujourd'hui et pour les années à venir.

Notre gouvernement se réjouit de pouvoir travailler avec les membres de la MASS et les autres intervenants pour élaborer un plan d'alphabétisation à long terme pour les enfants de la province - plan qui fera en sorte que les élèves du Manitoba obtiennent la meilleure éducation possible.

Je vous adresse toutes mes félicitations pour votre engagement pour l'excellence en éducation et vous souhaite beaucoup de succès.

Ian Wishart

Ministre de l'Éducation et de la Formation du Manitoba



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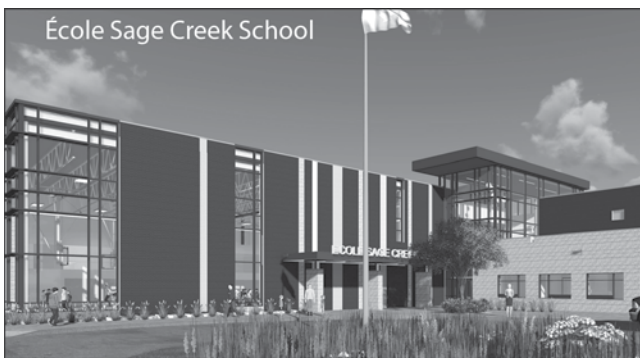
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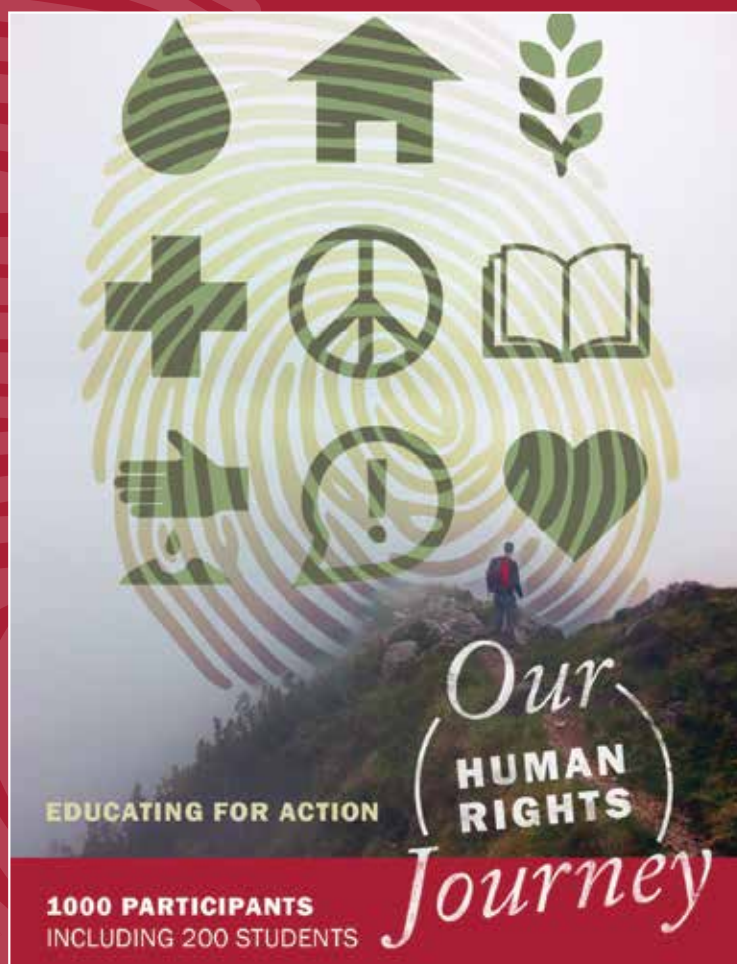
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MASS believes that our mandate is to be *leaders of learning*, in our local school systems and in the broader domains of provincial, national and global public education.

We model learning that is:

- Active and visible;
- Based on robust research;
- Tested through purposeful application in the field; and
- Evaluated using a wide range of meaningful data.

We take responsibility for our own continuous learning and the learning of everyone we lead:

- Creating and fostering supportive, inclusive and challenging environments;
- Ensuring essential learning for each and every child; and
- Preparing others to go beyond our own learning.

We are guided by our learning in shaping policy and practice to achieve what is best for the children in our care.

MASS believes that improved achievement and wellbeing for all of our students requires a shared commitment to raising both equity and quality.

- A conscious and persistent commitment to equity, system-wide and across sectors, leads to poverty reduction, greater inclusion and an appreciation for the riches that diversity brings.
- A purposeful and sustained commitment to quality education for every student increases the capacity for teaching, learning and leading throughout the system.
- A strong grounding in **literacy and numeracy** and a rich learning experience involving inquiry, creative agency and artistic expression enables all students to achieve success and to flourish.

MASS actively works towards equity and quality throughout the public education system, with a special focus on three action areas:

1. Indigenous Education
2. Mental Health and Wellbeing
3. Early Learning

MASS FOCUS COMMITTEE PRIORITIES FOR 2016-2017

Early Learning

The MASS Focus Committee will take leadership to ensure that MASS:

- Develops a plan for advocacy at every level for the Call to Action in the renewed MASS position paper on Early Childhood Education.
- Participates actively on the Provincial Educaring Committee.
- Calls on the provincial government for a renewed and more robust commitment to early childhood education, including a greater integration with the current public K – 12 system.

Indigenous Education

The MASS Focus Committee will take leadership to ensure that MASS:

- Aligns MASS efforts with the Calls to Action in the *Truth and Reconciliation Final Report* (TRC).
- Promotes ever increasing academic achievement, graduation, school completion and positive life outcomes for Indigenous students
- Participates broadly in liaisons with Indigenous partner groups, building awareness, taking collective action and gaining resources to support the MASS Call to Action for Indigenous education and the Calls to Action in the TRC Final Report.
- Participates actively in inter-organizational initiatives that address the Calls to Action in the TRC Final Report.
- Works with partners to improve preparation programs for Indigenous teacher candidates, while advocating for increasing the number of Indigenous teaching candidates.
- Supports actively the teaching of Indigenous perspectives, corrective history and culture and the use of Indigenous languages.
- Promotes social enterprises by using their services wherever possible for MASS activities and encouraging MASS members and educational partners to do likewise.
- Works with partners to host a provincial Student Leadership Cohort that will

build cultural proficiency, leadership in leading courageous conversations about racism and participate in drafting of a student proclamation as a response to the Calls to Action in the TRC Final Report.

- Calls on CASSA to address the Calls to Action in the TRC Final Report at the national level, as part of our national voice.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

The MASS Focus Committee will take leadership to ensure that MASS:

- Supports full implementation of the provincial Children and Youth Mental Health Strategy.
- Collaborates with The Education for Sustainable Well-Being Research Group at the University of Manitoba in developing tools to assess the well-being and well-becoming of students in schools.
- Hosts a MASS November Conference on the theme of Citizenship and Well-becoming, with Joel Westheimer and Thomas Falkenberg.
- Pursues inter-sectoral liaisons with public and mental health organizations and agencies.
- Contributes to a national voice on mental health through CASSA and through input into the Canadian Mental Health Strategy.
- Promotes gatekeeper training in mental health for all educators.

Our
(HUMAN RIGHTS)
Journey

Educating for ACTION: Our Human Rights Journey

This provincial conference, co-sponsored by the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents and the Manitoba Teachers' Society, will support our work in all of the focus areas outlined above and in many other areas related to our work in equity and human rights.

Growing Support for LGBTQ-inclusive Education in Canada

By Catherine Taylor, Faculty of Education, University of Winnipeg, and Tracey Peter, Sociology, University of Manitoba



LEFT: Members of the Manitoba Teachers' Society proudly marched in Steinbach's first Pride Parade in July.

The Every Teacher Project

Our partnership with the Manitoba Teachers' Society (MTS) enabled the research team to secure the active participation of every national, provincial and territorial teachers' organization in the publicly-funded school systems of Canada. Each organization actively recruited its membership to complete our lengthy survey in the 2012/2013 school year. Originally, we had hoped to involve 750 teachers and eight focus groups, judging that this would be a reasonable number for a survey on an issue that would not be top of mind for most. We ended with 3,400 participants and 24 focus groups, making this the largest study of its kind to date worldwide.

Overall, teachers reported that they were aware of harassment of LGBTQ students, ranging from daily exposure to demeaning language like "that's so gay" (67 per cent) to physical harassment (33 per cent), sexual harassment (23 per cent) and sexual humiliation (20 per cent). However, educators did not specifically link harassment to safety for LGB or trans students until specifically asked to do so. While 97 per cent rated their school as safe, far fewer (72 per cent) rated their school as safe for LGB students, and fewer still (53 per cent) for transgender students.

This offers insight into why generic approaches don't work to create safe schools for LGBTQ students. Further, teachers expressed strong approval for LGBTQ-inclusive education (85 per cent) and reported that it is personally important to them to address LGBTQ issues with students (86 per cent). Very few (two per cent) reported religious objections (one per cent

In the Fall 2012 issue of *The MASS Journal*, I wondered in these pages whether the age-old freeze on LGBTQ-inclusive education in Canada might have begun to thaw. We had just released the final report of the "First National Climate Survey on Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia in Canadian Schools," and I had been moved by the empathic responses I encountered from educators and superintendents across the country, and heartened by the passage of LGBTQ-inclusive legislation in Ontario and policy in several Manitoba school divisions.

Four years later, I think we can say that the thaw is well and truly underway, and Manitobans' contributions have been instrumental in this regard. Nowhere was this more evident than on July 9, 2016, at Steinbach's first Pride march, where 4,000 people joyously gathered to express their commitment to safe and inclusive schools and communities for LGBTQ youth.

It is therefore in a spirit of high hope that we present the results of two recent national studies: the Every Teacher Project on LGBTQ-inclusive Education in Canadian Schools, conducted in partnership with the Manitoba Teachers' Society (MTS) and funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada; and the National Inventory of School System Interventions in Support of LGBTQ Youth Wellbeing, conducted in partnership with the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) and funded by Canadian Institutes for Health Research.*

in secular schools, five per cent in Catholic schools).

While they are keenly aware of the need, educators also reported real barriers to engaging in LGBTQ-inclusive education practices. The most common reasons given were lack of training or teaching resources (33 per cent), a belief that “my students are too young” (31 per cent), fear of parental or religious community opposition (23 per cent), or that “it would jeopardize my job” (16 per cent in secular schools, 52 per cent in Catholic).

The National Inventory

Thanks to the support of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS), the National Inventory survey was endorsed by 41 national, provincial and territorial organizations of school system superintendents, teachers, school leaders and parents’ councils, all of which allowed us to name their endorsement in our recruitment letter to school district superintendents. The survey was conducted in the first half of 2014. We ended with a 36 per cent participation level (141 districts), comprising 48 per cent of Canada’s schools and 50 per cent of Canada’s teachers and students. Participation was proportionately representative of school districts in the categories of region including urban/rural/remote, secular/Catholic and French/English. That report was launched in July at the national conference of the Canadian Association of School System Administrators in Winnipeg.

The survey enabled us to create an inventory of interventions that had been implemented across the country in support of LGBTQ youth’s well-being, together with the motives for implementing them (for example, to increase resilience) or not implementing them (such as generic policy). The National Inventory data will be invaluable to the larger research team as we work to identify the types of interventions that are most effective in achieving desired outcomes.

Overall, superintendents were much less likely to associate generic policies than LGBTQ-inclusive policies with positive outcomes for LGBTQ students. Many were nevertheless not planning to develop specific policy. This is perhaps to avoid conflicts, or because they are unaware of the research showing that specific policies are more effective. A small number asserted that there was

no homophobic harassment in their district or that generic policy adequately addressed the problem. We do not know whether their confidence is actually reflected either in lower rates of homophobic harassment in their districts or in effective response to it.

Many districts had implemented LGBTQ-specific interventions for early and middle years, but at somewhat lower rates than for senior years. However, a fifth of participants indicated that they have LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and, of those, most indicated they have it in kindergarten to Grade 8 schools. Very few ($n < 5$)

reported personal or community opposition on religious grounds as reasons for not implementing an LGBTQ-inclusive intervention.

Most districts had job protections for LGBTQ staff, but fewer indicated teachers could be open with students about being LGBTQ. Superintendents were much less likely to associate such job protections with positive outcomes for students than they were to associate other interventions with such outcomes. This is notable given the acknowledged importance of role models for students with marginalized identities and



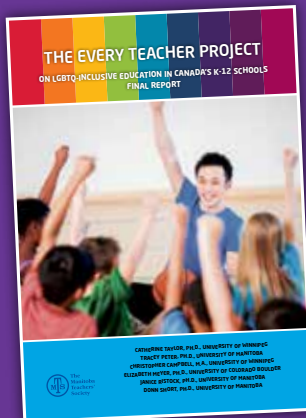
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*The Every Teacher Project was funded by a Standard Research Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Catherine Taylor, Principal Investigator). The National Inventory (Catherine Taylor, Lead Researcher) was part of a larger research project funded by an Operating Grant from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (Elizabeth Saewyc, University of British Columbia, Principal Investigator). Tracey Peter led the statistical analysis for both projects.

the known damage to mental health from living a double life.

Where are we now?

The most positive finding of the First National Climate Survey in 2012 was that 58 per cent of cisgender (conventionally gendered) heterosexual students said they found it distressing to some degree, ranging from a little to deeply, when they heard homophobic comments—even though 73 per cent said they had made such comments themselves and only 23 per cent had ever intervened when they heard such comments.

This suggested there was substantial, largely untapped solidarity for their LGBTQ peers in the student body, and that they might welcome some help from educators in shifting their behaviour. As I survey the Canadian terrain in 2016, I see a much improved landscape where students in many schools now have that support. Following are some of the highlights:

- Four provinces (Ontario, Manitoba, Quebec and Alberta) have legislated some form of LGBTQ-inclusive provisions in their legislation. As a result, school divisions in the majority of the

country's population are now supported or compelled by law to establish gay-straight alliances (GSAs) on student request, and/or to develop and implement policy that works proactively to create safe and accepting school climates for LGBTQ students.

- Several Ministries of Education have worked with school districts to develop system capacity and provided LGBTQ-specific professional development for school system administrators and school leaders.
- In British Columbia, more than two-thirds of their 60 school districts now have LGBTQ-specific policy.
- School divisions, such as Vancouver, Winnipeg and River East Transcona, have developed excellent policy on transgender accommodation, covering aspects such as a student's preferred name, pronouns, sports teams, bathrooms and overnight field trips.
- The Manitoba High School Athletic Association has adopted this one-sentence policy: "Any transgender student athlete may participate fully and safely in sex-separated sports activities

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in accordance with his or her gender identity.” Go to www.mhsaa.ca/about/page-id-487/Policy-on-Transgender-Students.

- Public opinion continues to grow in support for LGBTQ rights, with 68 per cent of Canadians approving of same-sex marriage in 2015. Manitoba Premier, Brian Pallister, who had opposed same-sex marriage while an MP and Bill 18 as an MLA, has stated that his views on marriage have evolved and he will not re-open Bill 18.
- Most secular high schools and many elementary schools in urban areas have GSAs (or some equivalent LGBTQ-themed club). Students are generally allowed to name their own clubs and often adopt more inclusive names such as Queer-Straight Alliance (QSA); Gay, Lesbian or Whatever (GLOW); or Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA).
- Teacher organizations (including the Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Organization representing 40,000 teachers) and school districts have a large presence at Pride celebrations across the country.

Conclusion

What stands out most for me in the findings of the Every Teacher Project and the National Inventory is that *nothing* stands out dramatically as a reason for not getting on with it. It is as if the system had just frozen up under the sheer weight of its own historical exclusion of LGBTQ people and we continued to exclude them from the dignity of participating in ordinary, everyday life at some schools simply because it has always been that way and we are balking at the starting gate.

Whatever our reasons for not moving forward in some schools at this late date, the result is that many students continue to learn from silent teachers that LGBTQ people still aren’t equal and no one will mind if they are abused and excluded at school or anywhere else. For these students, it is as though the Charter of Rights and Freedoms had never existed.

In many Manitoba schools, though, the “Don’t say gay” rule is a thing of the past. Their school system leaders embrace their legal responsibility to protect minorities from discrimination. Teachers in their schools are free to discuss LGBTQ topics

with students across the curriculum and LGBTQ students have a decent chance of experiencing a safe, respectful and inclusive education. No form of education can erase all negative experiences from the complicated life of children and adolescents, but LGBTQ-inclusive schools can eliminate a major source of marginalization and rejection that has been responsible for endless and completely unnecessary anxiety, fear, depression and even deaths.

As the Climate Survey found with students five years ago, both the Every Teacher Project and the National Inventory found tremendous goodwill for LGBTQ-inclusive education among educator and school system administrators. It was deeply moving to see you out in force at Steinbach Pride, and I know that your show of support has brought comfort and courage to LGBTQ staff, students and parents who are feeling shamed and isolated in their schools.

I look forward to continuing to work with school divisions and Manitoba Teachers’ Society as we strive to ensure that all of our school systems provide educators with the training and resources they want and need. ■

Dr. Catherine Taylor is Professor of Education at the University of Winnipeg. Dr. Tracey Peter is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Manitoba. Longtime research partners on national studies of LGBTQ-inclusive education,

their next venture involves working with colleagues across the country to develop effective approaches to integrating LGBTQ-inclusion into the admittedly crowded curricula of B.Ed. programs. Taylor can be reached at c.taylor@uwinnipeg.ca, and Peter at tracey.peter@umanitoba.ca.

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Seeking Diversity...

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By Melanie Janzen, University of Manitoba

We were an eager bunch — new teachers assembled around tables in a poorly lit room to learn about benefits packages, the local teachers' association and some general divisional information. It was 1994 and I was thrilled to have secured a teaching job. I was at the school division's information session for new teachers, where my colleagues and I dutifully took notes as various administrators walked us through the divisional ins-and-outs.

At one point, one of the consultants matter-of-factly listed some of the topics we were not allowed to bring up with our students. One of these topics was "homosexuality." I was surprised, but dutifully recorded this under the list of "do nots" in my notebook. Years later, when this practice became public through student activism, the school division asserted that this was never an actual *written* policy.

In 1999, a teacher in a different school division in Winnipeg wanted to tell her

Grade 8 students about her partner, disclosing their lesbian relationship. However, her school principal, citing school division policy, warned her not to do so. The teacher took the school division to court and the court found that the division's policy was discriminatory and violated both the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and the *Manitoba Human Rights Code*.

These stories illustrate the many ways in which heterosexuality has been normalized in Manitoba's schools. By normalized, I mean the ways in which certain assumptions have come to be thought of as natural or indisputable. This heteronormativity in schools assumes that heterosexuality is the norm and creates further assumptions that teachers (who are predominantly women) are straight. When heteronormativity makes heterosexuality the norm, alternatives are considered *abnormal*. Therefore, teachers who might identify with sexual orientations and gender identities other than straight women or men risk being perceived as not-normal or lesser than those who identify as heterosexual.

Thinking about the ways in which heteronormativity has pervaded, and arguably still pervades our schools, I think about the wedding announcements and celebrations, the massive amount of classroom literature and resources that portrays predominantly (only?) heterosexual couples, teachers who have photos of their families and husbands/wives on their desks, or the use of the titles such as Mrs., Mr., or Ms., which can presume a fixed and particular gender and orientation. All of these subtle, and yet very naturalized and pervasive acts, centre heterosexuality and marginalize those who might identify otherwise, staff and students alike.

Such normalizations are the result, in part, of policies and practices which determine behaviours and attitudes. For example, the earlier stories demonstrate the ways in which school divisions' practices and policies, such as not talking about "homosexuality" or not being allowed to disclose one's sexual orientation to students, actively prohibits teachers from doing so. Once such policies are in place, practices such as workshops on what not to talk about or

interventions by school administration when policies are breached, regulate teachers' behaviours.

When teachers are not allowed to talk about or enact certain practices, then only *some* teachers' stories and beliefs are allowed to be shared, only *some* perspectives are assigned a positive value and only *some* identities are constructed as normal. The other stories, beliefs, values and identities become taboo and are forced to go underground.

These practices create a homogeneity of perspectives and narratives that reinforce assumptions of who teachers are: white, predominantly female and straight.

The University of Manitoba drives change

The faculty of education at the University of Manitoba (U of M) is taking the issue of the lack of diversity in the teaching force seriously. One of our recent actions has been the creation of a new *Diversity Admissions Policy*. The policy aims to achieve greater diversity within our student body by committing up to 45 per cent of all available spaces to those who identify in one of five diversity categories. These categories

include applicants who identify as Indigenous, racialized, LGBTTTQ, a person with disabilities or otherwise disadvantaged.

The categories and the percentages assigned to each are targets that our faculty has set, and which came from a three-year research and community consultation process. All applicants must still meet our admissions criteria (including holding a previous degree, having a minimum 2.50 GPA, completing a graded writing test and providing three letters of reference, which are compiled to create a composite score) and compete for entry based on their scores.

The *Diversity Admissions Policy*, which takes effect in the fall of 2017, is based on three principals.

1. The recognition of social and historic injustices faced by marginalized groups;
2. The lack of diversity in the teaching force; and
3. The acknowledgement that diversity is a benefit that improves all of our lives; students, teachers and communities alike.

In articulating the first principle—countering social and historic disadvantage—we recognize the ways in which laws, policies and practices have favoured particular

groups of people over others. We can counter that disadvantage by creating opportunities to try to level the playing field and attempt to improve the conditions for those who have been marginalized. The creation of these kinds of policies is upheld in our *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, which values the amelioration of social and historic disadvantage by creating policy, legislation and circumstances that counter such disadvantage.

This first principle reveals the difference between equal treatment, where we treat everyone the same (for example, everyone who meets the basic eligibility requirements is able to apply to the B.Ed. program); and equity, where we provide specific opportunities for particular people or groups of people (for example, LGBTTTQ applicants are given priority in the admissions process).

Research demonstrates that a more diverse teaching force, one that includes the perspectives of those from various racial, ethno-cultural, linguistic, sexual orientation and/or gender identities, benefits our students. When students see teachers who are *like* them, they feel as though they can identify with those teachers and consequently



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develop positive relationships with them. A student who might struggle with understanding her/his own sexual orientation, or has a friend or family member who identifies as LGBTTTQ, sees this as a normal part of the human experience when these various identities are reflected within the teaching force.

Moreover, teachers who come from groups that have been marginalized better understand issues of oppression and are more likely to speak out and act out against it, and will actively teach students about oppression. This is an important aspect of what critical education attempts to do and can be more actively pursued when we have a diverse teaching body.

We all benefit from greater diversity. A diverse teacher workforce helps to illustrate the ways in which the lives of teachers, students and community members alike are enriched through multiple perspectives. We come to understand, appreciate and advocate for each other through knowing one another. This is a part of the story we tell about Canada and about ourselves as Canadians. We have enshrined these values of diversity in our Charter and in our *Manitoba Human Rights Code*. These values are woven within our curriculum but need to be actively established through our policies and practices as well.

It is important to note that policy is not just about creating guidelines for practice. Policy is also an enactment of beliefs, a statement of an organization's values. The faculty of education's *Diversity Admissions Policy* is not simply an adjustment of our faculty's admissions targets; it is a public statement of our values. This policy declares that the diversity of our teacher candidates matters. It invites all of those who might have been previously marginalized to consider themselves welcome in our faculty.


We recognize that a more diverse student body will require a greater sensitivity to issues of diversity and equity with our own building and programs. We have been having conversations about what this diversity means in action. Where will the non-gender specific bathroom go? Where are we raising LGBTTTQ issues in our courses and in our programs? How do we ensure all of our students feel safe, regardless of how they identify? How do we engage with prospective LGBTTTQ applicants and extend invitations to those who might like to apply?

Although policy is important, our subsequent responses and actions matter just as much. This work has only begun and will require continued discussions within our faculty about issues of diversity and equity, and how these issues will and should affect our programs, courses, policies, practices and pedagogies.

It wasn't until 2013 that the Manitoba government officially legislated that students could form gay-straight alliances (GSAs) in their schools. Many students had established GSAs prior to 2013 and many schools had teachers, cultures and clubs that fostered conversations regarding LGBTTTQ issues, but imagine all of those students who didn't have that access or validation until just three years ago? Consider all of those students who didn't have a place to ask questions, support a friend, or feel they could come out safely?

These experiences create marginalization, and perpetuate shame, fear, guilt and ignorance. The U of M Faculty of Education's *Diversity Admissions Policy* is one way to ameliorate past discriminations, to say to those students who might have felt excluded by past actions, "your perspective matters; you are welcome here." ■

Melanie Janzen is an assistant professor and the associate dean (undergraduate programs) in the faculty of education at the University of Manitoba.



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Everyone Welcome, a Winnipeg School Division Reality

By Julie Millar, Radean Carter, and Ashley Pearson, Winnipeg School Division

“Just wanted to voice my support for the Safe and Caring policy. I’m very proud of our school division for advancing acceptance and inclusion. I saw the rainbow ‘Everyone Welcome’ posters and pointed them out to my children because I felt so proud to see this message in our school. Thanks very much.”



EVERYONE WELCOME



“**E**veryone Welcome.” That’s the first thing you will see when entering a school or building in the Winnipeg School Division (WSD). It’s a large, colourful poster adapted from two of the most recognized international LGBTTTQ symbols—the pink triangle and the rainbow flag.

Originally, the pink triangle was employed by the Nazis in World War II to identify lesbian and gay people in concentration camps. The LGBTTTQ community reclaimed the icon as a symbol of empowerment and remembrance for those who suffered. The rainbow flag was inspired by the Flag of the Races, which had five stripes, each representing the colours of human kind. The six colours of the rainbow flag stand as a symbol of pride, diversity and unity of the LGBTTTQ community: red for life, orange for healing, yellow for sun, green for nurture, blue for harmony and purple for spirit.

Drafting the policy

Beyond symbols to action, WSD identified the need for a Safe and Caring policy for LGBTTTQ students and staff. The policy would give weight and authority for support of learning environments that respect diversity, create welcoming and safe spaces, raise awareness, and support and protect everyone. Respect and safety are for everyone, in every school. However, LGBTTTQ people typically experience higher rates of harassment, discrimination, suicide rates, as well as poor mental and physical health outcomes.¹

Policy development requires a committed team to research, examine educational literature, explore other policies and dialog with noted experts and agencies in the field. In addition, the WSD Board of Trustees recommended an extensive consultation and feedback process which began with a panel discussion in the fall of 2015.

The wisdom and advice from professionals from the Rainbow Resource Centre, and Gender Dysphoria Assessment and Action for Youth Clinic, as well as the passion and bravery of a parent of a “gender creative” child and a 20 year old transgender man, drew laughter, tears, enlightenment and admiration from the audience. Teachers, trustees, clinicians, principals, vice-principals and senior administration attended. It was a turning point in WSD’s full recognition of the challenges faced by the LGBTTTQ community.

To support consistent messaging and information about the new draft Safe and Caring policy, an online video was created. It highlighted sections of the draft policy, and included student and staff testimonials about the need for the policy. Parent groups, community members, students and staff viewed the video, which culminated with three specific feedback questions:

1. Is there anything missing from the draft policy?
2. Do you have any concerns about implementing the policy?
3. What solutions do you suggest to address your concerns?

The feedback

Winnipeg School Division supports a progressive and diverse set of communities where a policy such as Safe and Caring enjoy broad support, but we recognized that putting it into practice would be complex. The feedback from the consultations and online survey was extremely helpful in revising the policy and determining our next steps. After analyzing the feedback, the top five recurring comments, concerns and questions focused on:

1. Bathrooms and change rooms;
2. Professional development and training;
3. Communication with parents;
4. Safety; and
5. Field trips.

Some of the positive feedback was moving.

"I am THRILLED at this policy, and at WSDs teaching about gender fluidity and non-conformity, and support of the kids and staff who this policy supports. I am so very pleased that my child is learning so much in such a positive way, and in such a matter-of-fact, supportive environment."

"I am the mother of a trans person. I asked my son to assist me in reviewing the policy and have worked in collaboration with him on this. I realize that his and our reality and experience is not emblematic of all trans people, but he is an activist for and very involved in the trans community and his perspective is worth considering. Thank you for the time and effort that has gone into this document and for the stand you are taking by declaring this a division priority!"

While WSD recognizes that there are some members of our community who may be uncomfortable with this policy, we can't let some people's discomfort violate other people's human rights. We will be focusing on some key factors for administering the policy equitably across the division. Some of these include maintaining accurate student records, referring to students and employees by their preferred name and pronoun, minimizing gender segregated sorting, providing access to gender inclusive washrooms and appropriate change rooms, along with the review of dress codes.

WSD is forging ahead with required Inclusion Across the Rainbow workshops, which incorporates Human Rights, anti-homophobia, and Safe and Caring policy training for new staff. An online tutorial is being developed for staff who have not taken this training prior to 2012.



It starts with awareness

Educators may be unsure of how to support their LGBTTTQ students in a meaningful way. We want to provide opportunities for staff members to voice their questions and concerns, talk through scenarios and share ideas for creating school climates in which their most vulnerable students feel safe and valued. From students to senior administration, everyone has a role to play in creating an inclusive school climate. Proper training gives all school community members a thorough understanding of the part they play in making their school an environment that welcomes all students.

In addition, a communication strategy is evolving and will include updated definitions, Frequently Asked Questions, a poster campaign, along with continual renewal of our comprehensive resource and support materials in our schools and libraries. Using inclusive and respectful curricular content allows students to see themselves reflected in the material they are reading and learning.

We want to enable our LGBTTTQ students to safely and comfortably live their lives, normalizing transgender issues across the division. This will be done in coordination with WSD inclusive practices such as safe and healthy school strategies, bully prevention initiatives and our Healthy Minds mental health strategic plan.

For youth to thrive in our schools and communities, they need to feel socially, emotionally and physically secure and supported. Creating learning environments that respond to all students' needs includes providing explicit support systems for LGBTTTQ students, such as our gay-straight alliances (GSAs). A full day GSA student forum will take place this year to provide an opportunity for students and teachers from various GSAs to meet, share ideas and collaborate. Students will also participate in the OUTShine International LGBTQI2S Youth and Ally Summit in Windsor, Ont. in the spring of 2017.

As a final point, we know when staff and other adults serve as allies and role models for students, and take a stand against homophobic comments, it has a significant impact on academic success and feeling safe in school. Symbols, icons, banners and logos are important in our messaging because they represent what we stand for and what we believe in with respect to inclusion, caring and safety for all. It is in our actions that we can ensure our beliefs become reality.

Winnipeg School Division is proud of its diversity and embraces change that improves quality of life for everyone. The Safe and Caring policy, along with nurturing practices, learning innovation and engagement has the power to build an environment that is truly welcoming for all students.

"I have a good friend who is transitioning to a female and when she looked over the policy, she cried. She didn't live in a world or a time when her rights and freedoms to be who she is were valued or protected. Well done Winnipeg School Division! This stuff makes me proud!" ■

Julie Millar is the Director of Student Services for the Winnipeg School Division. Radean Carter is the Public Relations Officer for the Winnipeg School Division. Ashley Pearson is the Policy and Program Analyst for the Winnipeg School Division.

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Overwhelming Acceptance of Gender Identity Guidelines

By Kelly Barkman, Greg Daniels, and Wanda McConnell, River East Transcona School Division

Destiny Klassen, a petite green-eyed blond who likes gymnastics and dancing, came out in January 2015 when she was in Grade 4. Looking back, her mom Chantal says she's grateful her daughter's transition went so smoothly. The principal, staff and Destiny's peers at school accepted and supported her without hesitation.

"We felt like everyone really cared about us. The staff had taken the time to understand and to accept the new Destiny," Chantal says.

Only one issue presented a challenge. "It was trying to explain to Destiny why she couldn't use the girls' washroom because of what was underneath her clothes," says her mom.

That all changed in October 2015 after Klassen received a call from Greg Daniels, an assistant superintendent in River East Transcona School Division (RETSD). Daniels was phoning to say the Board of Trustees

had approved a document containing a wide-ranging set of gender identity guidelines for students and employees.

Among the guidelines was a reference to washroom access. Transgender students could use the washroom that corresponded to their gender identity or they could use a gender neutral washroom.

It was welcome news for the Klassen family. Destiny could now do what she longed to do: use the girls' washroom. "It was a great relief for her and for us all," Chantal says. "Now she could identify as exactly who she felt herself to be."

Creating a standard of action

The acceptance of the guidelines—one set for students and another for employees—was the culmination of almost a year of work behind the scenes, prompted by a request in September 2014 from another transgender student to use the girls' washroom.

"It was a request for accommodation that was new to us. It made us realize we needed to research this and make sure we

had guidelines in place for future cases," says Daniels.

Kelly Barkman, RETSD superintendent, adds that until then, the division was dealing with requests on a case-by-case basis and students had always requested a gender neutral washroom. "We knew we had to move beyond individual requests and do something that would apply to all divisional buildings and to all of our students and employees."

It became a journey of learning for everyone, says Daniels, who oversaw the development of the guidelines. Over the next several months, he and his colleagues educated themselves about the needs of transgender students.

An extensive search for policies and guidelines already in place in other school divisions and public institutions across Canada was conducted. This information would ultimately form the basis for RETSD's own guidelines.

Daniels consulted with Manitoba's Department of Education about matters such as the use of a student's preferred name versus legal name on school records. He also talked to staff at the Rainbow Resource Centre, an



organization that supports Manitoba's LG-BTQ community, about proper terminology and the resources they provide to schools.

After a tremendous amount of work over several months, it was an exciting and rewarding moment when the documents, *Respect for Human Diversity: Gender Identity Guidelines for Students* and *Respect for Human Diversity: Gender Identity Guidelines for Employees*, were presented to the Board of Trustees and accepted unanimously.

"We already had a strong position that was reflected in our Respect for Human Diversity and our Human Rights policies, and now we have these guidelines that underpin them and that we expect all of our stakeholders to uphold. We want to ensure our schools are free from discriminatory practices based on gender identity," says Barkman.

The guidelines outline the roles and responsibilities division staff, students, parents and guardians, and school community members and groups, must adhere to so transgender students and employees will be respected, accommodated and made to feel safe and supported in their schools and workplaces.

Privacy and confidentiality are a high priority in the guidelines. Unless the student or employee has given permission, their gender identity must not be disclosed except on a need to know basis.

Legal names are used in the division's student information system and on report cards, transcripts, cumulative files, and provincial assessments, Daniels says. In all other situations, with their permission, transgender students can be addressed by their preferred name, including when they walk across the stage to receive their high school diploma.

Washroom access is explained in the documents. Students and employees can choose to use the washroom they identify with or use a gender neutral washroom. All RETSD schools now have a gender neutral washroom that anyone—transgender or not—can use. In fact, Daniels says, in some RETSD schools where there were no other options, teachers willingly gave up their washroom to designate it a gender neutral washroom for all to use.

Transgender students also have the right to access the change room that corresponds to their gender identity. If they or any other student would prefer more privacy, alternate arrangements will be provided. Those accommodations could include a private area within a public area (for example, a



Izaiya Schuster.

bathroom stall with a door or an area with a curtain), a separate changing schedule or use of a nearby private area.

The guidelines stipulate schools are to avoid separating students by gender when possible for sports, classes and other activities. In gender-separated activities, transgender students can participate in accordance with their gender identity.

The guidelines also reference curriculum integration and an expectation that all schools will deliver inclusive provincially-approved curricula where all members of society, including transgender students, see themselves represented in what is taught in class. School libraries are also required to have materials that are affirming of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Every school or workplace must have a person who can act in an extended advocacy role or be a safe contact for students and colleagues who are transgender.

And, most importantly, every request for accommodation will be dealt with in a respectful, safe, inclusive and flexible manner to meet the needs of the student or employee.

Daniels says that while the division continues to handle accommodation requests on a case-by-case basis, everyone now knows that the transgender student's or employee's preference, as provided for in the guidelines, will be accepted and appropriate accommodations will be made.

Educating the school community

Once the guidelines were approved by the Board of Trustees, a campaign to inform division employees and the wider



Destiny Klassen and her mom, Chantel.

community about them began. Announcements and links to the guidelines were posted on the divisional and school websites and mentioned in principals' messages to parents. The division's community newsletter also included an article about the guidelines.

Meanwhile, extensive professional learning began across the division. Daniels explained the guidelines and their complexities to principals, managers, directors and supervisors who, in turn, shared that information with their employees. At the school level, principals were asked to present the guidelines at a parent council meeting.

The education is ongoing. New employees will be briefed on the guidelines as part of their orientation, and schools and workplaces will be encouraged to consult the guidelines when they have requests for accommodation from transgender students and employees.

Checklists and a Q&A document have been created to help teachers and other staff understand what they need to do to support a student or employee through the transition process and to continue that support following transition.

"We've had nothing but positive feedback about our guidelines and supporting materials," says Daniels. "Our families, schools and our student services personnel are grateful. They all seem to have a comfort level that everything is being done to support some of our most vulnerable students, to raise awareness and to make a transition as smooth as possible."

Making a real difference

Izaiya Schuster, who was in Grade 12 when the guidelines were introduced, says he appreciates them, too. He came out in 2014 and his transition went well, but he says he knows it isn't that easy for everyone.

"A lot of different situations can arise for transgender students, and the way things

are handled can vary from school to school. I think the guidelines can be very helpful to other transgender students who may not be as lucky as I was with my experience," he says.

Destiny's mom is also glad the guidelines are in place. "When Mr. Daniels phoned to tell me about them, I couldn't thank him enough for all the time that was put into this and for not giving up on these children."

She says the guidelines need to be there, in writing, so that everyone knows exactly what to expect. "It doesn't matter how much we say as parents, it has to be written down as guidelines for people to follow because otherwise, there's the risk people will just do what they want. Now that they're there, it will make it easier for other children like Destiny."

As superintendent, Barkman says the journey involved in the creation of the guidelines represents his deep desire as a caring educational leader to do what is required to meet the needs of all students and employees in the division.

He says the journey included a lot of fellow travellers who are to be commended, including Daniels and his team, his fellow senior administrators, school level administration and staff, and the Board of Trustees.

Daniels adds that he is most gratified by the positive impact the guidelines have had on the families of students who are transgender. "It has meant so much to them to see their children's rights are no different than any other student's." ■

Kelly Barkman is Superintendent and CEO, Greg Daniels is Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources (instructional), and Wanda McConnell is the Senior Communications Co-ordinator, all for River East Transcona School Division.

River East Transcona School Division's guidelines can be found at www.retsd.mb.ca/yourretsdpolicies.

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The Other Side of the Mirror

“We have to dare to be ourselves, however frightening or strange that self may prove to be.” – May Sarton

By Grayson Ethan Alexander L’Hirondelle

My parents always told me that when I grew up I could be anything I wanted to be—a doctor, a scientist, a musician. The possibilities seemed endless, but what I never knew was that before I could achieve my dream career, whatever it might be, I would spend 18 years on a journey of self-discovery.

I was born in the beautiful city of Kamloops, B.C. My parents were excited to welcome into the world their first child, a daughter they named Kristina Margaret L’Hirondelle. I was the first grandchild to my Oma and first great-grandchild to my great-grandmother

Growing up, our family moved around a lot, from B.C to Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, until finally settling in the little town of Gretna, Manitoba. For the longest time, I remember being into all the girly things—playing with dolls, reading books, playing with makeup, wearing little dresses. If it was girly, I had some part in it. Going to school was fun. I made lots of friends, even with kids who were older and in higher grades, because I was always such a friendly and outgoing person who had to be friends with everyone she met.

Midway through the 1996/1997 school year, we moved to a small rural

When Grayson sees his reflection, like is shown in this photo, he is confident in the person he sees.



village called Rhineland and I continued my Grade 2 year at Border Valley Elementary School. A little over a month passed and I was getting ready to go to bed. I had no idea that come the next morning, I would feel different about myself.

The alarm went off and I rolled over to shut off the annoying sound. Realizing it was 7 a.m., I sleepily got out of bed and headed to my closet. I turned to my right to see my mirror hanging on my wall but the reflection I saw was not the reflection of the same person who went to bed the night before. The reflection I saw looking back at me was the reflection of a small boy!

Believing this could be a trick of my tired eyes, I walked over to my mirror and placed my hands on the reflection. This didn’t change what I saw and after staring at the mirror for roughly 10 minutes, it dawned on me; the reflection of the small boy was me.

What did this mean? Why was I seeing a young boy in my mirror?

At this moment, I turned away and continued to get ready for school. Trying not to think too much about it, I went on with a normal day.

That morning’s images stayed with me and foreshadowed big changes. I realized as each day went by that I was more and more uncomfortable in the girl clothes I was wearing and the brown hair down my back. I was feeling more comfortable having boys as friends than girls.

In the spring of Grade 4, on a beautiful warm and sunny day, I got up to get ready to go to school. Only this time, instead of wearing the usual girl clothes that were in my closet, I snuck into my little brother’s room and borrowed some of his clothes. I quickly got dressed and covered up so my family wouldn’t see. When it came time to reveal what I was wearing at school, even though I felt comfortable and confident, what I wore placed a bulls-eye on my back for becoming a victim of bullying for the next three and a half years of school.

My parents finally found out what clothes I had been wearing to school and one day they pulled me aside and asked me, "Kristi, why do you wear boys' clothes?"

"I don't know. I feel more comfortable in them than in girls' clothes," I replied.

The response from my parents was nothing verbal, just a stare. A five minute stare. Once it ended, I went about my day.

After letting my parents know, came the challenge of school. Each and every day that went by the kids at school found some way to attack me. They made fun of the way I walked and talked, how I always had

my hair up or under a hat, that I wore boys' clothes and wanted to always be around the boys at school. I could hear the laughter behind my back and the name calling that taunted me through the hallways.

"What a loser."

"Is she trying to be a boy?"

"Kristi is a freak."

I would put on a brave face and venture off to school, but when I got home I'd run into my room and hide.

"Why is it when I look in the mirror I see my reflection as a boy?"

"Why are the kids making fun of me?"

"Why am I being punished for simply trying to feel comfortable in my own skin?"


I wanted at such a young age to end my life because I couldn't understand why this was happening to me and didn't want to suffer this way anymore. As I would lie there, I'd pray. I prayed to God asking Him to give me the strength to not give up. And he was there for me every step from that day on.

By Grade 8, I had been dressing like a boy for almost a full four years, and had learned to be strong and brave when people tried to knock me down. I'd become more comfortable with the clothes I wanted to wear, making it clear to both family and the few friends I had at the time that this is what I was comfortable in and that would not change for anyone. Then, just as I was starting to feel comfortable with myself, my parents told my brother and I that we would be moving again.

In September of 2006, I started high school at Mennonite Collegiate Institute. Over the years, I had changed my wardrobe, going from girly clothes to boy clothes, boy shoes, even wanting boy hair styles. Everything was boy, boy, boy. As the new year started, before I left to catch the bus, I glanced in my mirror and once again saw my reflection. As I took a deep breath, I said to myself: I am comfortable in what I wear. I will be strong. I will not change myself for anybody.

In the beginning, things went well. I walked around with confidence, not being ashamed of how I looked or of how I acted. I was one of the guys.

I met a girl and began to feel strange. I liked her, but not in the friendship type of way. We introduced ourselves to each other, hung out at school, talked and got to know each other. The more this happened, the more my feelings towards her got stronger. It was then that I came out as gay, telling my friends and family, and the increase it had on my self-confidence and self-esteem was indescribable. I felt free, fantastic, like a burden that couldn't be explained had been lifted off of my shoulders. For the next seven years, I felt like this, but eventually the joy I had experienced early on began to fade. Once again, I began to feel unhappy with myself and suicidal thoughts returned.



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At the age of 23, I began to look back on my life and question why I changed my style and my hair, why I tried shortening my name from Kristi to Kris, tried to lower my voice, found the courage to be known as a boy. It didn't matter how hard I thought or how long I thought about it, getting to a solution always eluded me. I knew that if I was patient enough, an answer would soon come my way. I found my answer.

In April 2014, I was in adult education wanting to get my life back on track. The environment was one where I felt free to be myself and be accepted no matter what. But there was still something missing. Later, one day after school, I was sitting at home talking to a friend of mine. As we delved into deep conversation, it hit me: I am transgender!

Finally, everything I had questioned over all these years made sense. The boy reflection in the mirror when I looked at myself, the changing of my wardrobe, the cutting of my hair, the wanting to change my name. No longer did I have to search because I finally realized who I was. I am not a girl, I am a boy, and I have always been a boy. The reflection I saw and still see every time I look in the mirror is a reflection of who I truly am.

All these years, I could never make sense of why things didn't make sense, of why people judged, bashed and ridiculed me. I never understood why, when I looked in that mirror all those years ago, it was never a little girl who I saw, but a little boy. And that is because I am not a girl. I am not Kristina Margaret L'Hirondelle.

I am now 25 years old. My name is Grayson Ethan Alexander L'Hirondelle, and I am an open and proud transgender male. I have never felt stronger, happier or more confident and comfortable with myself then when I realized who I truly am.

I have finally realized the reflection on the other side of the mirror is me. I am graduating in June and have been receiving hormone therapy (testosterone). With this new journey, there will be bumps and challenges. But, if there is anything that I have learned along the way, it's that I am a strong young man, and I can and will overcome anything that comes my way because I am proud of who I am! ■



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One Community's Journey: What Inclusion and Safe Spaces Look Like



*Students and staff participate in
Pride Day, May 2016.*

By Lindsay Brown and Manny Calisto, Seven Oaks School Division

Just as every person has a story, so too does every community. The Seven Oaks School Division (SOSD)—located in the northern region of the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba—is a community of learners made up of a uniquely diverse population.

Many of our students are first or second generation newcomers, representing a wide variety of religious and cultural beliefs. We defy the stereotype that diverse religious and cultural beliefs make it difficult to support and celebrate one another, particularly those in the LGBT2SQ+ community. On the contrary, we have had a great deal of success when it comes to fostering affirming and supportive schools where LGBT2SQ+ students and their families can feel welcome to be themselves. We are a division that prides ourselves on our inclusivity and takes steps to ensure our schools are welcoming and

safe spaces that celebrate the many facets of identity.

In order to understand where we find ourselves as a division today, it is important to look at the stages of the journey we have taken. It is also necessary to acknowledge the impossible task of accurately and thoroughly representing all of the stories of all of the individuals who have walked the halls of our schools. It is with this recognition in mind that we write this snapshot.

What LGBT2SQ+ inclusion looks like A Divisional GSA Gathering and National Conference

In November of 2015, staff and students from across the division met to discuss the work being done in our gay-straight alliances (GSAs) and to explore how we can work in solidarity with members of the LGBT2SQ+ community and their allies. Keynote speaker

Lara Rae shared her story and inspired conversations about how to support trans and gender-creative youth. Additionally, Maples Collegiate was a proud host—and SOSD a proud sponsor—of OUTShine: Canada's Second National GSA and Safer Space Summit in May of 2015. This conference brought together LGBT2SQ+ youth, allies and educators from across the country.

The rainbow flag being carried at the Divisional Pow Wow

Alongside the Canadian and American flags, the rainbow flag was a part of the Grand Entry. This inclusion demonstrates a respect for, and recognition of, members of the LGBT2SQ+ community.

Every school library includes books that reflect the lives of LGBT2SQ+ people

Books such as Linda De Haan and Stern Nijland's *King and King* and James

Howe's *The Misfits* are available to be checked out from each school library. Through these texts, students see themselves and their lives reflected. Just as it is essential to present students with texts and images reflecting a range of ethnicity, ability and culture, students need to see their identity, or the identity of their loved ones, as LGBT2SQ+ people as a normal part of everyday life. By using these texts in their classrooms, teachers help normalize the existence and lives of LGBT2SQ+ people and families, while making their students more thoughtful about the diversity that exists in their community.

Visible messaging of support in every building

It is to be expected that you will walk by at least one rainbow flag sticker on a classroom window or in the hallway of a school in Seven Oaks. These visual indicators of support let staff, students and members of the community know they are valued.

Ivan Coyote speaking to the entire division

Coyote's keynote address on our Divisional Professional Development Day challenged divisional staff to consider the experiences of LGBT2SQ+ folks through the sharing of their personal stories. Many staff report that years later they still find themselves thinking about the poignancy of, among many things, Coyote's call for gender-inclusive washroom spaces.

School-wide professional development opportunities

Working alongside the Rainbow Resource Centre, the Teacher-Led Learning Team, SERC and Klinik, Seven Oaks has made professional development (PD) opportunities available to all staff. Most schools in the division have participated in whole-school PD sessions that provided awareness training and have spent time examining what LGBT2SQ+ inclusion looks like in their building.

Pride picnics at early years schools

This past June, the GSA from Amber Trails Community School hosted their second annual Pride Picnic, an event that "celebrates all of us and all of the things that make us unique." An event for the whole family, the picnic featured Zumba, face painting, relay races and a wide variety of other fun activities.



(Photo on the left): The Rainbow Flag is carried in time in the Grand Entry of the Divisional Graduation Pow Wow, Maples Collegiate, June 2016.



(Photo on the right): A Safe Space poster at the entrance of École Belmont School.

Same-gender couples attending the Grad Dinner & Dance

When two graduates walk into the ballroom of the Dinner & Dance, smiling and holding hands, no one bats an eye. This is another milestone in their relationship, just as it is for their straight peers. They are able to celebrate. Just celebrate.

Students being supported throughout their transitions

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, "Gender variant students are attending schools in Canada, whether or not they are visible to other students, staff or administrators" (3). This is certainly true of students in Seven Oaks. However, an increasing number of gender variant students are coming out within the school system. Statistics state that gender variant students are at significant risk of experiencing verbal and physical harassment because of their gender expression, and 61.5 per cent report feeling unsafe at school because of gender or gender expression (Taylor 87). By educating all of our staff on best practices when working with trans-identified and gender variant youth, and ensuring that classroom documents accurately reflect students' gender identity, the division continues to do its part to help youth feel safe and embraced in our buildings.

Impromptu lessons on the history of the rainbow flag

Upon observing her students measuring their height against the Pride flag on the wall of the school hallway, one teacher took this opportunity to inform her class about the history and significance of the Pride flag.

What LGBT2SQ+ inclusion feels like Administrators and Superintendents support you

When members of the superintendent's team stand up at a New Teacher Workshop and tell recently hired staff that they are expected to integrate stories of LGBT2SQ+ lives, history and people into their classrooms, there is no room to doubt the division's stance., which is that it is our responsibility as educators to include LGBT2SQ+ voices.

You can be out and proud

There are many Seven Oaks staff members—including the authors of this piece—who are out members of the community in their school buildings. One staff member commented, saying, "When Ivan spoke at the Divisional PD Day, they said that we have a responsibility to be out. After thinking about what that meant for me and discussing it with some colleagues, I came out to a number of students. It was the most anti-climactic experience, despite how anxious I felt. I knew then that I could be out in Seven Oaks. I couldn't be out in any of my previous divisions."

You are not alone

There is a network of LGBT2SQ+ and allied folks in Seven Oaks working together at the school and divisional level, attending PD opportunities across North America to better support our LGBT2SQ+ students and staff, and making resources available to employees of the division in order to help ensure that LGBT2SQ+ people and lives are represented and celebrated in every school.

Policy is more than just words on a page

Staff feel confident that administrators will support them in the event that a parent or guardian challenges, for instance, their discussion of Transgender Day of Remembrance. One teacher reports feeling “fully supported when I received a very concerned email from a father who disagreed with a lesson on interrupting transphobia that was delivered in his child’s class. While his concern was rooted in his religious belief, I was reassured by my administrator that we were doing no wrong and that the lesson fit the curriculum.”

The voices of students matter and have influence

When a student from one of our high schools gave a presentation to the board about the lack of safety and support they were feeling in the division, the response was swift. Policy that specifically stated the division’s position on “creating a safe learning environment for LGBTTQ students” was drafted and adopted on April 9, 2012, 17 months prior to the passage of Bill 18. Research has shown that “Students from schools with anti-homophobia policies or procedures reported hearing expressions like ‘that’s so gay’ less often than participants from schools without such policies (65.4 per cent versus 80.6 per cent) reported hearing such comments every day)” (Taylor et al. 116).

The division’s acknowledgement of such research and subsequent implementation of policy that addresses the specific needs of LGBT2SQ+ people before it was provincially mandated, is evidence of our commitment to supporting members of the community.

Looking to the future

This article is not intended to serve as a checklist toward a finish line; making inclusive and safe spaces is an ongoing process with no predetermined end point. By celebrating the successes we have had as a division, it is our hope that this exercise in self-reflection will inspire us, as well as others, to examine the areas in which we still need to make changes.

With all of this success in mind, we must remember that where we are now is not where we have always been. It is necessary to keep in mind that not every student and staff member will see themselves or their experiences reflected in these overwhelmingly positive recollections. Although an informal student survey indicates there has been a significant decrease in incidents of homophobic bullying in our schools (“Tell Them from Me” 2009 through 2016), it still does happen, which means there is work to be done.

We have not reached our destination. However, we have accomplished much along the way that is worth celebrating. We are committed to continue working

toward the goal of helping every student and staff member feel as though they can comfortably be their most authentic self in our buildings.

In order to achieve this goal, an effort must be made to think intersectionally about the relationship between homophobia/transphobia/biphobia/heterosexism and other systems of oppression such as racism, ableism, ageism and classism. Those of us working with GSAs and social justice groups need to continue encouraging student voice and active engagement in social change. We must acknowledge and work alongside members of the two-spirit community to reconcile the effects of colonization on First Nations, Indigenous and Métis identities. Emphasis on PD must continue so we may continue the implementation of practical strategies to support our community. All of these goals are important to keep in mind while we continue our journey toward making the safest and most inclusive spaces possible.

Seven Oaks School Division graduates today have the privilege of being educated in a division that is committed to making schools safe and inclusive for everyone, including LGBT2SQ+ students, families and staff. We are hopeful that an education gained in SOSD is one that will shape every graduate into a more loving, accepting member of society who will stand up to injustice and speak out against discrimination. ■

Lindsay Brown teaches English Language Arts at Maples Collegiate, Seven Oaks School Division. Manny Calisto is the Vice Principal of James Nisbet Community School, Seven Oaks School Division.

The image shows a SkillsCompétences Canada Manitoba logo on the left and a Skills Work! poster on the right. The poster is divided into five colored sections: Technology (yellow), Transportation (green), Industrial (blue), Construction (red), and Service (grey). Each section contains a small image related to that field. At the bottom of the poster, it says 'Service' and shows a person working.

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Reflections on the Gifts and Challenges of Working with a GSA

**By Heather Anderson,
Pembina Trails School Division**

Some of the most complex educational issues I've encountered in my 20 years as an educator have been related to working with students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, queer, two-spirit and additional marginalized sexuality and gender identities not explicitly identified in the acronym, which is shortened to LGBTQ here. I've had the privilege of coordinating and supervising a gender and sexuality alliance (GSA), more commonly known as a gay-straight alliance, for 10 years and this experience has provided me with some of the most profound teachings in my career.

My purpose in this article is to recount for other educators and educational leaders some of the complex experiences I've encountered in my work with LGBTQ youth. These experiences range from basic support



For those of us who dare to dream big, we pursue opportunities that encourage justice and build equality, such as supporting a GSA. And we do this despite the challenges that exist.

and encouragement, to guiding students through curriculum revision proposals, to consulting with senior administration on overnight room assignments for transgender youth, to working over several years to secure an open-access washroom and change room for our vulnerable transgender youth. I want to recount the gifts and challenges so as to provide a full picture of what working closely with LGBTQ youth can be like.

Starting a GSA

Bill 18 Safe and Caring Schools necessitates the establishment of a GSA in any school, if requested by students. In practical terms, this leaves out many of the onsite realities that are not addressed by this policy change, such as who will coordinate and supervise it, if and how you inform your school community, and who the GSA intended for. Most of my urban-based colleagues who also coordinate GSAs volunteered to do so, largely because of the warm and supportive relationships they already had with LGBTQ students. But what happens when no staff member steps up? What happens when administration is not practically supportive of having a GSA? What happens if there is push back from the school community?

Some of the best resources for these questions come in the *MyGSA Handbook*, which was distributed to Manitoba schools in the fall of 2015 and is available online at edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/safe_schools/mygsa/gsa_guide.pdf. Another excellent resource with invaluable practical resources in through www.mygsa.ca. I turn to these resources frequently, even after 10 years of working with a GSA.

One of the first notions I want to dispel is that there is one way to have or do a GSA. There is not. I've seen GSAs unfold in myriad ways. Sometimes these begin as

closed-door meetings with a teacher and a handful of students, none of whom want to be identified as LGBTQ. These GSAs often grow into more public word-of-mouth advertised spaces where membership sometimes grows. Other GSAs begin with an open call to the school community for people to come on out (not literally) and be part of a new school club.

The GSA I am involved with began with one educator and two secretly gay students who met weekly to talk. There were no posters, no PA announcements, and no invitation to other students in the building. This was related to the safety needs of those particular students. Over time, our school became a safer space for LGBTQ youth, and friends of members began attending. We continued to grow, both in size and in support, to what we now have, which is a well-established school club that is regarded equally with the other school clubs. It took time and persistence to get there. It also took a belief that we deserved to be a there, just like Key Club or Student Council.

Ups and downs of GSA work

GSAs can draw unique students, many of whom are social-justice minded. This makes for exciting and inspiring work. Many of these students come with grand ideas about changing the world and a plan to begin that change by taking down the heterosexual hierarchy well established in schools. They often come ready with academic language about heteronormativity and the matrices of oppression faced by LGBTQ people. For the uninitiated, that language and those concepts can seem daunting, and curbing students' radical enthusiasm into focused planning can seem equally daunting. But this is also where the magic happens.

One of the greatest gifts a GSA has provided me with is the ever-changing experience of tethering the excitement and enthusiasm GSA members have for their community and human rights, and guiding them through the processes of policy work and policy change. When students see the power in knowing how a system works and then apply that knowledge to improving the school and life conditions of LGBTQ youth, they are filled with a sense of pride and accomplishment. And, perhaps most importantly, they see that they matter.

One issue that rears its head annually with our GSA is declining membership as the year progresses. This is especially pronounced in April, May and June. Each year I reassure the GSA student leaders that this is normal, the club isn't failing. Students are just so very busy at that time of year. But, each year, those student leaders look at me with broken hearts, like they've failed their community.

I share this insight because those of you coordinating a GSA or thinking of starting one need to know that this can also happen to you and your group. I've consulted with many other GSAs who suffer similar cycles throughout the year. A take away from this insight, then, is to begin gearing down the GSA in early May or to bring up this cycle in conversation much earlier in the school year so that members are aware of the possibility.

Curriculum challenges

There have been two curriculum areas that draw the ire of LGBTQ youth: health and physical education. Health tends to take the largest brunt of the criticism because of the heterosexual normative way it is generally taught. While LGBTQ terms are included in the Manitoba high school health curricula,

much of the feedback I hear from youth is that it's only straight sex and straight sexuality that are being taught.

Some schools are bringing in experts from Rainbow Resource Centre to teach lessons on non-heterosexual sex and health, but I am led to believe this is a rarity and not the standard practice. One of the reasons health classes raise the ire of LGBTQ youth is because these students, too, want to be educated about how to protect themselves during sex and in relationships, but few classes are talking about this kind of sex and those kinds of relationships.

Traditional male condoms don't have a place in lesbian sexual health. Gay men don't need to protect against risk of pregnancy. So, when the classroom lessons focus on condoms as a means to protect against pregnancy, those lessons privilege heterosexual sex and ignore LGBTQ sex. A gift, then, of working with LGBTQ youth, is to see the way that perspective shapes the delivery of curriculum. A challenge, however, is in guiding the educators delivering those health curricula to include the perspectives of LGBTQ youth as standard practice.

Physical education takes the brunt of the gender complexities given that many educators continue to use binary gender (boys and girls) as a mechanism to divide the class or divide into groups. The gender-aware youth is going to take issue with this division, again because it privileges the binary division and ignores the many genders that don't fit that outdated binary. If you are a transgender person in a physical education class where the teacher has called for boys on one side and girls on the other, then you have the awkward position of figuring out where you belong.

Again, a gift is in seeing the ways our language define what's considered normal and therefore also what's considered unusual. There are so many alternatives to boy and girl groupings, such as by birth date, shoe size, favourite ice cream flavours. A quick call to Rainbow Resource Centre can get you a host of other alternatives.

Washrooms and change rooms

Our group worked for five years to have a washroom identified as an open access washroom. We did not have a space built; instead, we asked to have access to a single user, keyed lock, large washroom on the main floor of our building.

This washroom had previously been designated as the washroom, change room and grooming room for our students who required assistance with toileting and grooming.

The dilemmas that emerged from our request for access generally related to potential conflicts with sharing that space, concerns over student misuse of the space and potential issues with keys to the space. Over five years, we managed to assuage those concerns and eventually our LGBTQ students who needed a safe washroom and change room secured their own keys to the space. Many students gave up waiting for access during this time and would leave the school for home or a public washroom nearby when they had to change or use the bathroom.

While I see the keys to that space as a win for our GSA and community, I also see the struggles we went through as generally unnecessary. Many of us considered the hurdles we overcame as reflective of the heteronormative and gender binary norms that persist throughout school settings. The functional toileting needs of our transgender youth, for example, took second place to ill-founded imaginings about heterosexual youth using the space to have sex or the concern that key holders might misinterpret the locked door and light on inside as signs the space isn't in use and enter anyway.

All of the concerns raised about LGBTQ access to this washroom framed LGBTQ youth as dangerous in some way. Over time, we were able to increase the knowledge, assuage those fears, and provide a washroom and change room space for the LGBTQ youth who identified a need for such a space.

Strength in numbers

Last year, a group of us in Pembina Trails School Division (PTSD) who were either supervising a GSA already or hoped to start a GSA in our school met as a Professional Learning Team (PLT). Most of our conversations centred around the how to's, such as how to start, how to draw students, how to inform the school community, how to protect vulnerable youth, how to get parental permission for a field trip without outing a child.

What was most impressive, to me at least, was the dedication these teachers, principals, vice-principals, guidance counsellors and educational assistants had

for supporting LGBTQ youth. People in this group were so willing to give their time, talent and expertise. They were so eager to hear any insights those of us who had experience with GSAs might have to offer. One of the reasons this PLT worked so well was because we had support from senior administration. That support came in two forms: one was financial support for release time and resources, and the other was sanction.

I'll talk a bit about the importance of support from administration in the form of sanctioning. Because senior administration was aware of the purpose of our PLT, which was to support the growth of new GSAs in the majority of PTSD middle schools and in all high schools, we felt encouraged to pursue this aim. We felt senior administration also thought GSAs mattered and that PTSD schools should have one.

This kind of sanctioning bolsters the confidence educators have with regard to pursuing not only a GSA, but also in pursuing the inclusion of LGBTQ related content in classrooms and schools. The gifts of support and collaboration with passionate educators means that more GSAs are likely to emerge, which will mean more support and inclusion for LGBTQ youth.

Conclusion

As with all student groups, working with a GSA presents us with gifts and challenges. The gifts, from my experience, far outweigh the challenges. At a minimum, working closely with LGBTQ youth reminds us why schooling matters as a social endeavour because we are faced with the realities of justice and injustice, with equality and inequality. And, in those moments, we define ourselves as educators as well as the kind of society in which we want to live.

For those of us who dare to dream big, we pursue opportunities that encourage justice and build equality, such as supporting a GSA. And we do this despite the challenges that exist. We do this because the gifts that are offered and received are the gifts that can make our schools a truly better place for LGBTQ youth. ■

Heather Anderson is a doctoral candidate at the University of Manitoba as well as a classroom teacher and English Language Arts Consultant with Pembina Trails School Division.

Making a Difference in Northern Manitoba



By Daniel Dillon, Hapnot Collegiate, and Libby Stoker-Lavelle, Flin Flon Reminder

Teachers and administrators in Canadian schools are increasingly recognizing how students' sense of safety and belonging can impact their ability to learn and grow. Gay-straight alliance (GSA) clubs are evolving in many schools as one method for cultivating a more welcoming and safe atmosphere for all students.

According to Egale's School Climate Survey Report, "Youth Speak Up about Homophobia and Transphobia," three-quarters of Canadian lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) students and 95 per cent of trans students feel unsafe at school, compared to one-fifth of cisgender, heterosexual students. The report also showed that LGBTQ students would not be comfortable talking to their teachers (four in 10), their principal (six in 10), or their coach (seven in 10) about LGBTQ matters.

When I became the equity and social justice chair for the Flin Flon School Division in fall 2013, I realized there was no official space in the school division welcoming students who identified as LGBTQ. While attending a provincial seminar for equity and social justice representatives in Manitoba schools, I learned that having a GSA in a school can have a significant positive impact on a school's culture and can be a key step to helping all students feel safe in school. I picked up tips from my peers on the process of implementing a GSA and decided to assess the interest in creating a GSA at Hapnot Collegiate, the main high school in our small northern school division.

The administration at Hapnot Collegiate was immediately supportive of the idea and several teachers volunteered to serve as staff advisors. Soon, the club was underway. A community mental health worker, who had struggled with bullying when he was a gay student at the school in the 1990s,

volunteered to attend meetings and serve as a resource for students.

After the GSA club was announced, there was a trickle of interest from students, but we had difficulty building and sustaining the club's membership. As staff members, we had to recognize that the concept of a GSA was new to most of our students and joining a club that deals with LGBTQ issues could be a socially risky act, especially for teenagers who are in the process of developing their identities and self-esteem. In our first year, there were more adults than students at many of our meetings, but the two or three students who did attend regularly seemed to respond to the sense of community in the GSA and the opportunity to connect with staff and students who they trusted.

During that first year, our meetings were informal and social, though we often discussed topics related to LGBTQ rights, issues in the news and explored support networks students could tap into in a rural community with an

almost-invisible LGBTQ population. At the end of the year, we reflected as a group about the GSA. Several students expressed an interest in growing the club and recruiting new members. They also said they wanted to raise awareness on issues that meant something to them and their local community.

Following that conversation, the club decided to expand its mandate to include broader equity and social justice issues. The club took on a new and rather unwieldy, name: The Equity and Social Justice/Gay Straight Alliance Club (ESJ/GSA). Now that the club has been in place for three school years, students who join Hapnot Collegiate in Grade 9 see an established and ever-evolving ESJ/GSA club where students are accepted for who they are.

We currently have about nine official members, although attendance at meetings varies widely. Gradually, student leaders have stepped forward and found their place as organizers of GSA initiatives. Club initiatives have mainly focused on creating awareness about equity and social justice issues in the community and fostering a more welcoming, safe school environment.

ESJ/GSA initiatives in the North

We Day

As a teacher, I know the value of professional development and the importance of networking and learning from my peers. I've tried to cultivate a similar experience for ESJ/GSA students by providing an opportunity for them to attend We Day, an annual youth empowerment event held across the country and organized by Free the Children.

We took delegations of students to the Winnipeg event in both 2014 and 2015. The experience has had a palpable effect on the energy and enthusiasm within the club, with students coming back to the community inspired and full of ideas to create positive change locally. While in Winnipeg for We Day last year, we had the opportunity to take the students to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights for a self-guided tour and a guided tour, which offered students an opportunity to further explore topics discussed at We Day.

Kindness Notes

During the week leading up to Valentine's Day, students from the ESJ/GSA club wanted to anonymously share kindness throughout the school. Club members developed an initiative called Kindness Notes where members of the school community could write kind comments and the members would collect and deliver the notes throughout the week to staff and students.

Think Pink Fridays

Students within the Flin Flon School Division participated in the annual Pink Day campaign, which was started by Travis Price to raise awareness about bullying. The ESJ/GSA members felt that just one day a year was not enough to raise awareness about such an important issue, so they started Think Pink Fridays. The ESJ/GSA members encourage students and staff to wear pink every Friday to show support for bullied students and raise awareness about bullying, discrimination, homophobia and transphobia.

November 11 Project

Students conducted research on LGBTQ victims of the Holocaust and created triangles for students to wear at the school's November 11 ceremony in honour of those individuals.

We Are Silent

For the past two years, ESJ/GSA students have participated in several Free the Children campaigns. This year, the students decided to focus their Free the Children fundraising efforts towards supporting a school in Chimborazo, Ecuador. For We are Silent—one campaign in which students participated—they worked to draw attention to populations that are often silenced in society and collecting donations in exchange for spending an entire day in silence.

Orlando Shooting Vigil

After the shooting in a gay nightclub in Orlando that killed 49 and injured 53, members of the ESJ/GSA club participated in a community vigil to show support for the victims and members of the local LGBTQ community that still face struggles.

Pride Bracelets

As the 2015 to 2016 school year wrapped up, members of the club decided they wanted to raise awareness about Pride Month in Flin Flon. The students created rainbow bracelets and sold them during breaks at school and at an information booth at the community's annual Trout Festival. Their attendance at the festival was well-received and the students raised nearly \$300 to be put towards future club initiatives.

Individual student initiatives

In the last school year, three ESJ/GSA members pursued independent projects that furthered the goals of the club as a whole. Last year, students in several Hapnot classes worked on 20Time Projects. This teaching strategy is outlined by Kevin Brookhouser in his book, *The 20Time Project: How educators can launch Google's formula for future-ready innovation*.

This approach involves students using a portion of their class time to pursue projects of their own interests and then later present their findings in a public forum.

Two club members decided to build their knowledge of best practices in GSA clubs for their 20Time Projects, with a goal to increase membership in the ESJ/GSA club over time. The two young women read the 114-page *GSA Guide: Safe and Caring Schools – A Resource for Equity and Inclusion in Manitoba Schools* and produced a TedTalk-style presentation for the community.

Another member of the club, a Grade 9 student, chose to focus on meeting the needs of trans youth for a 20Time project in his computer class. A trans student himself, he noticed youth who were transitioning often wanted to purchase a new wardrobe that corresponded with their gender identity. He discovered there were no online platforms for local youth who were transitioning to find quality clothing for free or at a very low cost. Living in a northern community limits a youth's ability to access affordable clothing outlets like Value Village. After hours of research and support, he started a Facebook group called Trans Kids Clothing Swap where transitioning youth can exchange low cost, if not free, clothing that will make them feel more comfortable.

Hapnot's ESJ/GSA club continues to evolve, based primarily on the interests and needs of its members. Ultimately, the group's mandate remains twofold: it is a safe space for students seeking support as they uncover their identities and is also a club where students can meet, share ideas and take action to improve their school and their community. This combined mandate has resulted in a growing membership and the creation of an extracurricular program where several students have found their comfort zone. ■

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**Vocal Health for Teachers: Paying Attention to Your Voice**

Approximately 58 per cent of teachers will develop a voice disorder within their lifetime. This is not surprising. Teachers spend most of their day talking in noisy environments, sometimes shouting or straining their voices for an extended period of time. Almost 20 per cent of teachers report missing work each year due to vocal cord dysfunction. Poor voice quality doesn't only affect the teacher. Studies show that student performance is negatively impacted when teachers have a raspy voice.

How can teachers protect their voices while maintaining an efficient level of instruction? Many standard recommendations are available online. However, making any behavioural changes can be difficult without support both on personal and administrative levels.

Are you experiencing vocal fatigue or a voice disorder? Symptoms of vocal fatigue, including a hoarse voice or sore throat, should subside after a 24-hour period. If symptoms persist for longer than two weeks, you should see your doctor.

Most voice disorders are treatable when caught early, but failure to address them may result in permanent damage.

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