

Deepening the Discussion: Gender and Sexual Diversity 2023



Deepening the Discussion: Gender and Sexual Diversity
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Preface

This document, *Deepening the Discussion: Gender and Sexual Diversity (2023)* is a renewal of the foundational document *Deepening the Discussion: Gender and Sexual Diversity (2015)*. *Deepening the Discussion: Gender and Sexual Diversity (2023)* is intended for school division staff to develop a deeper understanding of gender and sexual diversity and to assist them in providing safe, equitable and inclusive learning environments for all students.

Today's teacher has a challenging double task: teaching about gender diversity in a way that recognizes its existence and validity, while also teaching in classrooms in which gender diversity has always existed but is now demanding recognition and support.

Lee Airton and Susan W. Woolley, 2020

Disclaimer

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Introduction

The Government of Saskatchewan is committed to ensuring that all students, including those who identify as gender and sexually diverse, feel safe, protected and respected in our schools and our communities. Ensuring everyone has access to a safe, welcoming and inclusive learning environment is a priority in the provincial education plan. It is well known that when students do not feel safe or valued, it undermines their learning and well-being.

Education in Saskatchewan is founded on a principle of respect for the diversity of all students and families. Diversity enriches school culture and increases knowledge and understanding of similarities and differences. Diversity, within an education sector, applies to a range of contexts such as cultures, socio-economic situations, languages, learning needs and resources.

The intent of this document is to help Saskatchewan school divisions, independent schools and First Nations and Métis education organizations schools ensure that all students develop:

- a strong, positive sense of identity;
- a caring disposition;
- a respect for human and biological diversity;
- a commitment to the well-being of others; and,
- a desire and ability to engage in social action for the common good.

This document will assist individuals and communities to engage in meaningful actions to respond to the experiences, perspectives and needs of students and families who are gender and sexually diverse (GSD).

The purpose of this document is:

- to assist school divisions, central office personnel, administrators, educators, First Nation and Métis education organizations and community partners to develop a deeper understanding of gender and sexual diversity;
- to assist in understanding the unique educational, health and safety needs of staff, students and their families who self-identify as gender and sexually diverse;
- to provide practical strategies and suggestions to support schools and communities as they work with students to anticipate and overcome challenges related to transphobia, homophobia and heterosexism;
- to acknowledge the shared responsibility of ensuring that all students who identify as gender and sexually diverse have the same opportunities for safety, socialization and success in schools; and,
- to assist school divisions, independent schools and First Nations and Métis education organizations to fulfill their ethical and professional responsibilities to provide safe, equitable and inclusive learning environments for all students regardless of their actual or perceived differences.

Framework for Document

Meeting the needs of all Saskatchewan children and youth is a responsibility shared by families, teachers, community members and government. The goal of this document is to create safe and respectful learning environments for all students, including students who are or are perceived to be gender and sexually diverse. In Saskatchewan, the [Comprehensive School Community Health](#) (CSCH) framework provides a foundation for families, students and communities to work together to address school community health in a planned, integrated and holistic way. This holistic approach to creating safe and accepting learning environments encompasses the following components:

1. teaching and learning;
2. effective policy;
3. physical and social environments; and,
4. family and community engagement.

School divisions, schools and First Nations and Métis education organizations may use this document to:

- inform school division policy;
- promote individual reflections; and,
- support teachers in their professional commitments.

Gender and Sexual Diversity

Human sexuality is a positive and life-affirming part of being human. It is complex and includes knowledge of self, opportunities for healthy sexual development and sexual experience, a capacity for intimacy, the ability to share relationships, and comfort with different expressions of sexuality including love, joy, caring, sensuality or celibacy. Our attitudes about sexuality, our ability to understand and accept our own sexuality and to make healthy and informed decisions, and our capacity to respect the choices of others are essential aspects of who we are and how we interact with our world.

Sexuality is multi-faceted and includes the physical, emotional, spiritual and interpersonal development that influences one's thoughts, sexual feelings, attractions and behaviours towards other people. The role of sexuality changes throughout the stages of an individual's life. Sexuality is diverse, personal and is an important part of an individual's make-up. Sexuality includes sexual orientation and refers to what gender(s) someone is romantically or sexually attracted. Sexuality may or may not change over one's life span.

Research suggests that after the socialization of family, schools are major settings for gender socialization, partly because children spend large amounts of time engaged with peers in schools. Teachers and classmates help shape children's gender attitudes and, in turn, gender differences in cognition and behaviour. Schools can also shape a child's understanding of self in relation to others and their understanding of identity beyond the family.

Research also indicates that the education system needs to consciously support gender and sexually diverse students for the following reasons:

- Cisgender GBQ (Gay, bisexual and queer) boys were twice more likely than cisgender LGBTQ (Lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer) girls to report being verbally harassed due to their perceived gender identity (22% for GBQ boys versus 11% for LGBTQ girls) (Egale Canada, 2021).
- Fifty-seven per cent of 2SLGBTQ+ students reported moderate to high levels of anxiety as compared to their peers with 28 per cent (OurSCHOOL, 2021-22).
- Fourteen per cent of participants selected more than one sexual identity (Egale Canada, 2021).
- Seventy per cent of trans and/or non-binary youth reported experiencing some form of discrimination in their lifetime (Being Safe, Being Me, 2019).
- 2SLGBTQ Indigenous students were twice as likely (35%) to experience harassment based on their racialized identity than cisgender straight Indigenous students (14%). Similar differences were observed between 2SLGBTQ Black students (52%) and CH Black students (36%) as well as 2SLGBTQ Asian participants (41%) and CH Asian respondents (30%) (Egale Canada, 2021).

Sexual Diversity

Sexual diversity is a broad and complex construct that is understood as a fluid state that refers to one's sexual feelings and affection for one or more persons across the spectra of sex, sexuality and gender. A common misunderstanding is that sexuality is binary (one is either straight or gay); however, research over several decades indicates that sexual orientation exists along a continuum and involves a person's feelings and sense of identity; it is not necessarily something that is noticeable to others. Simple categories of straight and gay do not describe the lived experience of some people. Although the markers may vary with time and place, the diversity of sexual orientation (straight, gay, pansexual, asexual and bisexual) includes the varying emotional and/or romantic attractions to people of the same and opposite sex.

Sexual minority youth, or those who have sexual minority family members and friends, are attending Canadian schools, whether they make themselves known to others or not. Research indicates that anywhere between 5-11 per cent of people are sexually diverse or questioning their sexual orientation (Egale Canada, 2021).

Gender Diversity

Gender identity is different than sexual orientation. It encompasses one's sense of being man, woman, non-binary or another gender. In most cases, gender identity is consistent with anatomical sex and/or the societal expectations for male or female. However, in other cases, people's gender identity does not reflect their assigned sex. A person's gender identity is fundamentally different from, and does not determine, their sexual orientation (The Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, 2013).

Gender is all around us. It is taught from the time we are born and is closely monitored by society. Most environments are gendered – websites, toys, colours, attitudes, activities, bathrooms, clothes and behaviours to name a few. Accepted social gender roles and expectations are normalized in culture and anyone who does not fit within these roles and expectations can be marginalized. The way people perceive themselves is their gender identity, which may or may not align with their assigned sex. The way individuals communicate their gender identity, through their appearance and behaviours, is their gender expression. Transgender is a broad term used to describe people whose gender identity is different from the gender they were thought to be when they were born.

Components of Human Identity

This is a friendly infographic that visually represents four components of human identity. The terms associated with each category are ever evolving. Here are just a few:



ASSIGNED SEX

The biological classification of a person as female, male or intersex. It is usually assigned at birth based on a visual assessment of external anatomy.



GENDER EXPRESSION

The way gender is presented and communicated to the world through clothing, speech, body language, hairstyle, voice and/or the emphasis or de-emphasis of body characteristics and behaviours.



GENDER IDENTITY

A person's internal and individual experience of gender. It is not necessarily visible to others and it may or may not align with what society expects based on assigned sex.



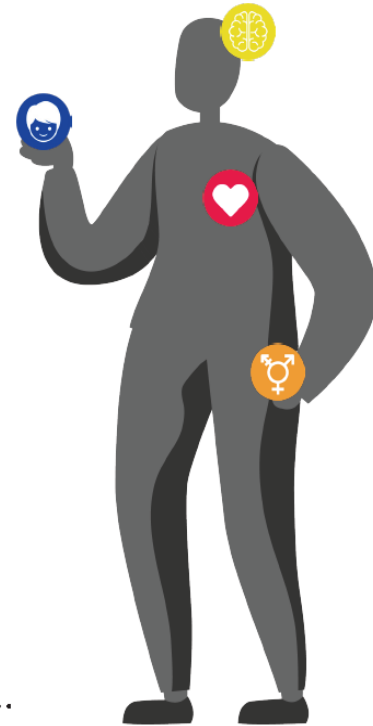
ATTRACTION

Often referred to as a sexual orientation, attraction describes a person's potential for emotional, spiritual, intellectual, intimate, romantic and/or sexual interest in other people and may form the basis for aspects of one's identity and/or behaviour.



UMBRELLA TERMS

Many terms related to 2SLGBTQI identities fall into more than one category.



Egale

Gender, like sexual orientation, is diverse and includes multiple gender identities. Gender fluidity conveys a wider, more flexible range of gender expression, with interests and behaviours that may even change from day to day where a student may feel they are a girl some days and a boy on others, or possibly feel that neither term describes them accurately.

To assume that males and females can be separated into discrete categories does not align with what is now understood about gender identity development. Gender variance is seen in the kinds of play children choose when left to their own devices. The notion of "girl play" and "boy play" may be "corrected" by adults who perceive there are strict boundaries signaling proper gender assignments. Children playing across the range of male and/or female toys are exhibiting only a small part of the considerable overlap between female and male interests, aspirations and lives. While many adults will "allow" a range in play activity among children, the real "challenge" lies in the fact that our society imagines that male and female designations are "real" categories, rather than socially constructed ideas and as fluid identities.

Schools should be proactive in creating responsive cultures and not wait until a gender-variant student comes forward to address the issues (e.g., appropriate bathrooms, segregated classes, overnight school travel arrangements, participation in extra-curricular activities, dress codes or name changes).

Transgender Students

Transgender students face unique challenges in their homes, schools and communities. Many of these challenges have to do with societal expectations about sex and gender. Some of these challenges, related to their gender identity and/or gender expression include:

- access to washroom and locker/change rooms;
- participation in gendered extra-curricular activities;
- school gendered dress codes;
- misunderstandings and misconceptions of gender;
- gender discrimination and rejection;
- lack of school and community supports;
- unemployment;
- informed medical care; and,
- not seeing gender minorities reflected in teaching and resources.

Why Do We Need to Understand Gender and Sexual Diversity in Schools and Communities?

There are many reasons why we need to understand gender and sexual diversity. These reasons have been categorized into five themes (Elizabeth Meyer, 2010):

1. Student Safety

Many incidents of bullying and harassment are gendered in nature; they isolate and target individuals who do not conform to dominant notions of masculinity and femininity.

2. School Culture

The silencing and marginalization of students and their families who are, or who are perceived to be, gender and sexually diverse tells community members that they are not welcomed or valued.

3. Student Physical and Emotional Health

Feeling ostracized and isolated in schools has long-term negative impacts on one's physical and emotional well-being. When students feel threatened, they may try to escape these negative environments through unhealthy behaviours.

4. Student Engagement and Academic Success

Students who attend schools where they feel safe and welcomed while experiencing a less sexually prejudiced environment are more likely to attend school, learn and succeed.

5. Diversity and Equity

Provincial curricula are designed to prepare students to become engaged citizens and to develop social responsibility. To live in a society that values all people and where every child has an opportunity for success requires finding ways to teach inclusively about the "hidden and marginalized experiences as well as the dominant and mainstream perspectives."

First Nations and Métis Ways of Knowing

First Nations and Métis communities have a diversity of worldviews, values and belief systems, within and among their nations. The belief systems and worldviews of First Nations and Métis peoples are based on recognizing and respecting the delicate balance of interdependence within oneself and with all living things in the environment, both tangible and intangible. Within this balance are elements of the physical, emotional, spiritual and mental, as well as teachings that have been passed down through the generations (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2018)

While there are commonalities among the worldviews of Saskatchewan First Nations and Métis communities, it is important to acknowledge that each language group has its own traditional perspectives about gender and sexual diversity. Although First Nations and Métis communities embody diverse values and beliefs, there are also some commonalities among the worldviews of the various language groups. Five common characteristics include:

- a holistic perspective;
- an interconnectedness of all living things;
- a connection to the land and community;
- the dynamic nature of the world; and,
- a strength in “power with”¹. (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2010).

While recognizing that discussions about gender and sexual diversity may be challenging for many educators and communities, it is important to ensure that meaningful dialogue and actions take place to benefit all students and families. It is important for educators to work closely with local Elders, families and communities to develop a shared understanding of gender and sexual diversity, including traditional and contemporary First Nations and Métis perspectives.

It is important to be aware of the differences among First Nations language groups in Saskatchewan and recognize that, historically, Two-Spirit individuals fulfilled various roles or functions, depending on the community. These individuals were often seen as “bridge makers” between male and female, and the spiritual and the material (Wilson, 1996). Their roles included being teachers, keepers of tribal knowledge, healers, herbalists, child caregivers, spiritual leaders, interpreters, mediators, and artists (Stimson, 2006). In other communities, Two-Spirit persons were not deemed a special role but were accepted and respected as part of the entire community.

Prior to colonization, many First Nations people accepted and respected Two-Spirit persons and their important roles within the communities. The impact of European influence on traditional spirituality and community values, combined with residential school experiences often resulted in Two-Spirit individuals being stigmatized.

In an attempt to protect their Two-Spirit people, many First Nations hid their Two-Spirit members and stopped passing on the Two-Spirit teachings (*Safe and Caring Schools for Two-Spirit Youth*, 2011). While some traditional First Nations and Métis communities recognized that being Two-Spirit was a gift and designated special roles for those individuals, many contemporary First Nations – due to the negative

¹ “Power with” is conceptualized as a circle where all things come together face-to-face in equal relationship to each other. It is the antithesis of “power over” which is hierarchical relationships (Alberta Education, 2005:18).

influence of colonialism – adopted prejudicial or homophobic attitudes similar to non-First Nations communities.

Schools and communities should collaborate to develop welcoming learning environments and plans to decrease harmful incidents of bullying and homophobic occurrences through reflection on traditional perspectives and worldviews. Plans may include holding gatherings with Elders, family members and educators to discuss values and beliefs such as acceptance and respect for Two-Spirit individuals as expressed through traditional teachings.

Contemporary Perspectives

The contemporary contexts for First Nations and Métis individuals who self-identify as gender and sexually diverse are complex, however, it is important that each community acknowledge and support students in a holistic way that is respectful of each person's unique situation. Today, many gender and sexually diverse persons are exploring and learning about traditional ways of being, including what it meant and means to be Two-Spirit.

In 1989, the First Nations queer, lesbian and gay community met in Toronto, Ontario. This was an opportunity for many to meet for the first time and to establish an organization and a sense of community. The community called themselves the Gays and Lesbians of the First Nations and created a vision that sought to do the following:

- forge a link between our sexual identities and our identities as members of the First Nations and Métis communities;
- provide a safe environment for members to interact and share with each other;
- strengthen and share cultural knowledge; and,
- encourage a positive image and self-image of Native lesbians and gay men by reinforcing that traditional knowledge (Government of Canada, 1996).

“In general ... [Two-Spirit is] used by Indigenous people to recognize that there's a diversity of sexuality and gender within our cultures.” Dr. Alex Wilson, Interview 2021

The Two-Spirit community is working to strengthen identities through embracing cultural traditions that validate and support who they are, rather than conforming to pre-existing identities or labels. To support this process, schools and communities need to recognize the important role of relationship building and dialogue to ensure that Two-Spirit youth feel safe and live without fear of bullying or violence.

Assumptions, Privilege and Oppression

Society is increasingly aware of diversity in age, ability, gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation and socio-economic privilege and values equality and human rights. Teachers who understand and value their own identities often recognize identity as a complex construction. Within this complexity, teachers may or may not be aware of the privileges that are reflected and reinforced in their classrooms, yet the choices and expectations that school divisions and teachers have are often reflective of these privileges. Educators bring

their life experiences, histories and cultures into their classrooms. They bring personal assumptions and beliefs about schools, families, culture and relationships.

Eagle Canada (2022) defines oppression as “the subordination or devaluing of one group by another based on historically rooted social hierarchies and biases. It can be experienced as marginalization, persecution, disenfranchisement, or through other barriers to equity based on a particular social identity (e.g., anti-Black racism, heterosexism).” Creating opportunities for social emotional learning helps dismantle oppressive structures and creates a more equitable school system (School Mental Health Ontario, 2022).

Heterosexism is the assumption that all people are straight, and that heterosexuality is the superior and only acceptable way of living. Whether intentionally or unintentionally these assumptions privilege and validate the worth of straight people. Conversely and consequently, many gender and sexually diverse individuals internalize negative beliefs about their self-worth, whereas straight individuals internalize positive beliefs.

Heteronormative Assumptions

Heteronormativity assumes being straight is the default sexual orientation, and the only normal or natural way to express sexuality and attraction. Heteronormativity exists in a number of prevalent and consistent ways, such as the following:

- creating a society where only straight relationships are visible;
- assuming that all people (i.e., students and their parents) are straight; and,
- leading well-intentioned individuals to ignore the needs and realities of sexually diverse individuals and relationships. (McGeorge and Carlson, 2009).

Examples of heteronormative assumptions include:

- assuming students, colleagues, and/or parents are straight and in opposite-sex relationships;
- assuming feminine males are gay or gay men are feminine;
- assuming that people choose to be gay;
- assuming that people fall into distinct and complementary genders (male or female); and,
- assuming any alternative to heteronormative behaviour is abnormal.

Heterosexual Privilege

Heterosexual privilege refers to rights, societal benefits and advantages granted to individuals based solely on their sexual orientation. This privilege is unearned, often unchallenged and provides an increased sense of worth that comes with being a part of the dominant, socially sanctioned group (Hoffman, 2004; Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, & Vernaglia, 2002).

Examples of heterosexual privileges include being able to do the following:

- find a selection of greeting cards for your opposite-sex parents/partner;
- show affection to your partner without having people respond negatively;
- not having to keep your identity a secret;

- openly talking about your relationships; and,
- not having to be “in the closet”.

Heterosexual privilege is often recognized in school divisions in the following ways:

- assuming that students and their families are straight;
- lacking policy to support students who are gender or sexually diverse; and,
- reinforcing heterosexism in curriculum, teaching (e.g., avoiding resources that depict same-sex families), environments, expectations, policies and laws by excluding the needs, concerns and life experiences of students and/or their families who are gender and sexually diverse.

Acknowledging the existence of heterosexual privilege is important because, as with all types of oppression, the discrimination experienced by gender and sexually diverse youth is inherently linked to, and amplified by, the advantages granted to straight persons in a heteronormative society.

Heteronormativity	Worldview in favour of opposite-sex relationships and complementary genders (male and female.) Aligns anatomical sex, sexuality, gender identity, and gender roles
Homophobia	Irrational fear, hatred, or intolerance to people who are, or who are perceived to be, gay or same sex attracted.
Transphobia	Irrational fear, hatred, and/or intolerance of transgender people or people who are gender diverse.

Exploring Privileged Identities

Issues of diversity and social justice can be challenging. Lack of understanding and/or resistance to evaluating and reflecting on personal beliefs about self, others and society often includes:

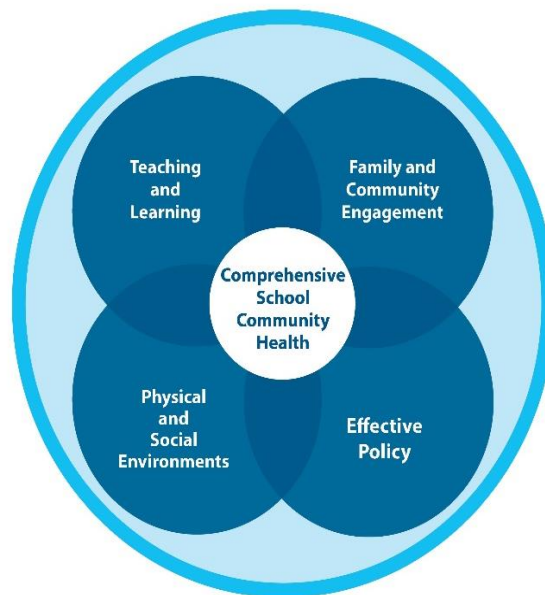
- **Denial that differences make a difference.**
When people are part of the norm, they often do not feel the need to examine how social identities affect their own and others' lives. While often made with good intentions, the claim that someone treats everyone equally and does not see differences denies aspects of who others are and the realities of others' lived experience.
- **Belief that "I'm just normal."**
When people are asked to name the social identity with which they most identify, they rarely choose a dominant identity (sometimes with the exception of identifying as male). They might do this because people who are part of privileged groups seldom have to think about their privileged identities; they are part of the norm and see themselves as "just normal".
- **Guilt, shame and discomfort about privilege.**
People, including students, may equate being part of the dominant group with being an oppressor – that is, a "bad person" – and may find it unsettling to acknowledge how they might be participating in and benefiting from systems that unfairly disadvantage others. Guilt and shame often arise as people explore privilege and oppression.

- **Focus on one's oppressed group identities.**

People are often more inclined to reflect on their marginalized identities than they are to think about how they are privileged. To avoid feeling guilt and shame, many people prefer to focus on how they are oppressed rather than on how they are privileged. Sometimes people feel that being part of an oppressed or disadvantaged group is preferable to being part of a dominant group and, therefore, attempt to shift the focus from how they are advantaged in one area to how they are disadvantaged in another (Goodman, 2010).

Comprehensive School Community Health

Providing a range of opportunities to link 2SLGBTQ+ education to curriculum outcomes administrative procedures and programs.



Working together with families and community partners to develop, renew and implement 2SLGBTQ+ policy, administrative procedures and programs.

Creating a safe and respectful school environment that is welcoming for all students.

Developing a gender and sexual diversity policy and administrative procedures that includes family and community input and reinforces 2SLGBTQ+ instruction and learning.

The following information provides a framework within which schools, school divisions and First Nations and Métis education organizations can support their efforts to embrace diversity, disrupt heteronormativity and make learning environments safe, inclusive and accepting of all students and their families.

[Comprehensive School Community Health](#) (CSCH) is an internationally recognized framework to support improvements in students' educational outcomes while addressing school health and safety in a planned, integrated and holistic way. In Saskatchewan, we have renamed this framework to include a focus on community. This section focuses on creating safe and accepting learning environments for gender and sexual minorities using a CSCH approach.

Income, education, employment, housing and social supports are determinants that impact individual and community health. Often additional health and safety challenges exist for people who are gender and sexually diverse due to limited access to responsive health services, prevalent discrimination and societal isolation, among other factors.

In Saskatchewan schools, health and safety issues of all children and youth are addressed through a CSCH approach. Creating inclusive schools requires educators and administrators to address the following components in their planning:

1. teaching and learning;
2. effective policy;
3. physical and social environments; and,
4. family and community engagement.

Comprehensive School Community Health:

- recognizes that young people who are healthy and feel safe learn better and achieve more;
- understands that schools can directly influence students' health, safety, attitudes and behaviours;
- encourages healthy and safe choices while promoting students' health, safety and well-being;
- incorporates health and safety into all aspects of school and learning;
- links health and education issues and systems; and,
- needs the participation and support of families and the community at large.

This ecological approach aims to enhance the school environment and actively engage students in their learning and in their communities. Creating a school that supports the health, safety and well-being of students and staff requires applying a "health lens" to the school's structures, policies and programs.

CSCH Approach to Creating Inclusive Schools

Research (Wells, 2006) indicates that the three most significant factors in building healthy and resilient school communities for students who identify as gender and sexually diverse are:

- development of school policies on inclusion;
- professional development training and awareness building; and,
- active and visible presence of student alliances for gender and sexual diversity or associated gender and sexual diversity support groups in schools.

These three factors are supported within a Comprehensive School Community Health (CSCH) approach to creating inclusive schools. CSCH is provided as the framework to ensure schools are safe, responsive, equitable, and inclusive of students regardless of students' actual and/or perceived differences. The four components of CSCH are described as:

1. Teaching and Learning

Teaching about diversity in positive and affirming ways can help create a classroom environment that supports transgender and gender nonconforming students and can also educate students of all genders

about the diversity of the human experience (Woolley and Airton, 2020). Saskatchewan's curricula are the foundation on which schools build students' understanding and knowledge about diversity, equity and human rights. The Government of Saskatchewan is committed to the creation and implementation of inclusive curricula that provide all children and youth with equal opportunities to develop the knowledge, abilities and confidence to pursue their life goals.

The Ministry of Education, through its provincial curricula, demonstrates its commitment to ensuring that all students are taught respect for themselves and for others. The [Broad Areas of Learning](#) support the development of life-long learners who have a sense of self, community and place, and as such, act as engaged citizens. Through the Broad Areas of Learning students appreciate diversity and demonstrate empathy and a deep understanding of self and others, including gender and sexually diverse identities (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010).

In addition, the [Cross-Curricular Competencies](#) of Developing Identity and Interdependence and Developing Social Responsibility are considered important in all areas of study. These competencies foster developing positive attitudes toward diversity and awareness of and respect for differences in gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, appearance, abilities, culture, ethnicity, language and income (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010).

Embedded within the Broad Areas of Learning and Cross-curricular Competencies are expectations that all students will come to an understanding of gender and sexual diversity as they develop a positive sense of identity, an understanding of self and others, meaningful relationships, empathy, a commitment in shaping positive change for the benefit of all, a respect for constitutional rights, advocacy for self and others and actions for the common good.

Inquiry Learning

Saskatchewan K-12 curricula are inquiry-based. Inquiry learning provides students with opportunities to build knowledge, abilities and inquiring habits of mind that lead to a deeper understanding of their world and human experience. Inquiry learning engages students in investigation of a wide range of compelling questions and big ideas such as those related to human interactions, empathy, bias, privilege, rights, responsibilities, equality, diversity and social justice for all people.

Sharing thoughts, teachings, knowledge and information is important, but it is equally critical to engage students in questioning what they see and hear, to develop mutual empathy, and to take actions that confront stereotypes, share truth, and impart knowledge in a way that protects their own safety and that of others. Support and empower students to understand that there are ways that each individual can call upon others, including older and respected members of their families and community, to reconsider their biases, perceptions and ignorance in a good way. Help students to practice these approaches of calling others to action through guided experiences with classmates, the larger school population, parents and community members.

Sample big ideas related to gender and sexual diversity include:

- the significance of identities (e.g., cultural, physical, social, gender, sexual);
- concept of the human family that helps create empathy and the responsibility that we each have for all members of our schools and communities;
- examine stories, experiences and issues within the context of local families, communities and territories;

- the importance of safety and our collective responsibility to watch out for one another as human beings, especially people who might be in vulnerable situations; and,
- creating inclusive and equitable schools and communities.

Sample inquiry questions:

- What does identity mean to you?
- Where does your identity come from?
- What is privilege and why is it not always recognized?
- How do our identities impact our lives?
- What role does gender play in our daily lives and futures?
- How does our use of language affect others?
- In what ways do social norms and cultural contexts affect identities?
- Why is it important to view identities from multiple perspectives?
- How can we build an atmosphere of inclusion, regardless of our personal or religious views?
- In what ways do social and cultural norms and behaviours impact public expression of same-sex affection?

High-quality learning resources are fundamental to successful implementation of provincial curricula. Selecting resources that represent diverse voices and affirm students' identities plays a significant role in shaping students' views about themselves, others and the world. It is important that these selected resources portray respect and dignity for all people.

Know Your Students

Educators must assume that there will be gender diversity in the classroom and school. It is important for teachers, and all adults working with youth, to consider that discussing male and female gender roles might cause hurt or feelings of "I don't belong" for students who are part of a gender or sexual minority. It is essential to know your students and to proceed in as respectful and non-judgmental a manner as possible while considering the multiple understandings of gender in various cultures, communities and families.

There may be real or perceived cultural differences regarding openness towards 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion and education in the school and community. It is important to establish a safe space in which to explore all perspectives and where all voices are valued, with the caution that abuse, discrimination, oppression, sexism and racism have no place in the classroom or in the community.

2. Effective Policy

Education in Saskatchewan is a shared responsibility. The Ministry of Education provides provincial curricula, policy frameworks, guidelines and funding to support schools, while boards of education and First Nation education authorities develop policies for their school divisions. School divisions and First Nations education authorities are encouraged to develop and implement anti-discrimination policies (e.g., anti-homophobia, anti-biphobia, anti-transphobia policies).

Actualizing A Needs-based Model to Support Student Achievement

The [needs-based service delivery model](#) focuses on developing and implementing procedures and practices to support all learners. The actualization of the model in schools is supported by three tiers of responsive instruction and supports available for all children and youth, including students who are gender and sexually diverse. These include classroom-based, school-wide supports; targeted and/or group interventions; and individual supports and interventions as necessary.

While it is recognized that universal classroom practices (e.g., resources depicting a diversity of family structures and ethnicities) as well as school-wide supports and services (e.g., Gender and Sexuality Alliances) will meet the needs of most students who are gender and sexually diverse, it is equally important that additional individualized supports and services such as counselling and mentorship are available to meet student needs.

Saskatchewan's Learning Resource Selection Guidelines

Learning resources play a significant role in shaping students' views about themselves and the world. It is important that these resources portray respect and dignity for people of all genders, sexual orientations, cultures, abilities and ages.

Providing a variety of high-quality learning resources offers students the opportunity to make choices in a resource-rich environment where students' thoughts and feelings are respected. This practice includes selecting learning resources that are fair and equitable concerning age, ability, culture, gender identity, socioeconomic status, religion, occupation and sexual orientation. Resources must be as free from bias as reasonably possible.

School divisions, schools, independent schools and First Nations and Métis education organizations create policies that protect the rights, safety and freedoms of students. It is important to regularly evaluate and update existing school policies to reflect safety and acceptance for sexually diverse students, gender-variant youth and their allies. Encourage your school, school division or First Nations and Métis education organizations to develop clear, safe-school policies that explicitly include sexual orientation, same-sex families and gender identity as protected grounds against discrimination.

Research found that the presence of 2SLGBTQ-focused school policies resulted in higher levels of teacher support for 2SLGBTQ students, which suggests policy provides needed guidance that they can and should support 2SLGBTQ students and content, as well as assurance that they may do so without fear of facing opposition without administrator support (Campbell et al., 2021; Day, Fish, et al., 2019) (Egale Canada, 2021).

Language used in development of policies and procedures should explicitly include sexual orientation and gender identity. It remains the responsibility of educators to preview and select materials that best meet the needs of their students, school and community. Educators should choose resources in accordance with their school division's learning resources selection policy. Some considerations include:

- Do the learning resources used in our school demonstrate consideration for the human worth and dignity of all people regardless of age, ability, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, occupation or ethnocultural background?
- How do our learning resources contribute to our students' understandings of the complexities of contemporary society?

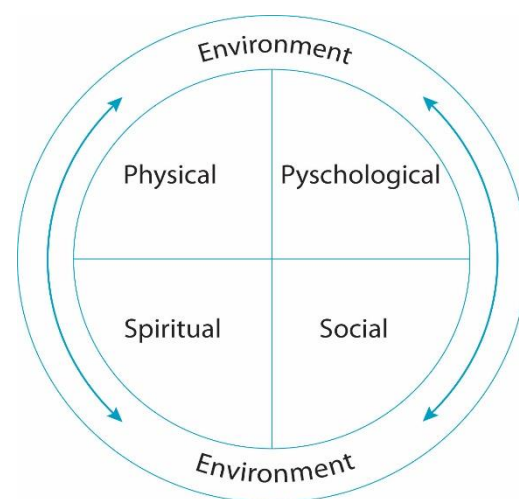
3. Physical and Social Environments

For 2SLGBTQ+ communities, experiences of discrimination are not unique, but are encountered across multiple aspects of life. Compared to the general Canadian population, transgender and gender diverse people are five times more likely to attempt suicide and have mental health issues (Government of Canada, 2022).

Schools and communities can foster the dimensions of wellness in all students. These dimensions are mutually important and interrelated in a balanced individual or community (see Saskatchewan's [Wellness 10](#) curriculum).

Because homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism are pervasive, failure to act against them allows them to continue. Inaction signals acceptance of homophobia, transphobia and heterosexism. Schools need to take positive steps to change this climate. Safe school environments for all students, including students who are or are perceived to be gender or sexually diverse, are reinforced when:

- school communications are clearly inclusive of all identities;
- young people who “come out” are positively responded to and accepted;
- staff participate in professional learning on heterosexism, homophobia and sexual orientation;
- staff reflect critically on personal and community values and how these values may interfere with respecting the rights and needs of students who are gender and sexually diverse;
- staff consistently address stereotypes, name-calling, transphobic and homophobic bullying every time they see or hear it;
- staff assist gender and sexually diverse youth to identify local resources of support;
- staff maintain student confidentiality when and where professionally appropriate as per *The Education (Parents' Bill of Rights) Amendment Act, 2023*;
- staff support the creation of a student-initiated Gender and Sexuality Alliances;
- staff diversify the school's learning resources;



- extra-curricular activities are welcoming to students who are gender and sexually diverse;
- staff identify specific homophobic/transphobic incidents (e.g., who was involved, what was said, what was done, what time of day, where it occurred) when collecting behaviour data for informed decision making; and,
- staff inquire about what levels of support the student has outside of school and what supports they may need in the school setting.

Student Participation in Safe Environments

Students should be able to safely participate in all environments at school. It is important that students are safe in physical education classes and on team sports. Participation in athletics, locker room access and privacy for changing clothes often create stress for youth. To address the issue of physical activity for transgender youth, the Canadian Teachers' Federation created a guide entitled *Supporting Transgender and Transsexual Students in K – 12 Schools* to assist educators in supporting transgender youth who, like their cisgender [or non-transgender] peers, should be able to participate in physical activity classes and recreational and/or competitive sports. Policies and procedures should be inclusive, regardless of gender identity or gender expression, in an environment free of discrimination and harassment. Schools can create this environment by educating staff and coaches, and by working with families so transgender youth are understood and accommodated in schooling (PHAC, 2012).

An Example of Supportive Social and Physical Environments: Gender and Sexuality Alliances

Gender and Sexuality Alliances (sometimes called Gay-Straight Alliances) or GSAs are student-run and teacher-supported school-based groups that work to support each other and to create safe, caring and inclusive spaces for students who are gender and sexually diverse and their allies. These alliances also create synergy for agency needed to create welcoming and respectful environments and to address transphobia and homophobia and other forms of related discrimination.

Gender and Sexuality Alliances are a vital piece of the systemic approach to reducing bullying and improving student safety and acceptance of differences (Kris Wells, 2006; Bradshaw, 2019). These alliances provide an opportunity to create change and are spaces where students can receive support, socialize and find community together.

Below are suggestions for school personnel, such as administrators, counsellors and teachers to assist students in developing and sustaining a GSA.

I'm very glad I'm graduating because high school was a toxic place for me where I didn't feel comfortable in my own skin. Hopefully the future will be different and a place where all students can feel comfortable (2SLGBTQ, Egale Canada, 2021).

- Increase public awareness of the GSA among students, educators, parents and mental health professionals across the school community.
- Support inclusion of GSAs at school-wide events such as assemblies, Pride events, etc.

- Ensure that GSAs are treated in a non-discriminatory manner as it pertains to promoting the club and hosting its activities.
- Address anti-2SLGBTQ+ bias and discrimination so that all students have equal access to their school's GSA.

Starting a Gender and Sexuality Alliance

Research suggests that schools with a gender and sexuality alliance improve student achievement and well-being and can help alleviate the negative effects of what can sometimes be a hostile environment for 2SLGBTQ+ youth (GLSEN, 2021):

- 2SLGBTQ+ students who indicated that their school administrators are supportive of 2SLGBTQ+ initiatives were substantially more likely to have a GSA in their school (Egale Canada, 2021).
- Alliances provide an opportunity to educate the student body about diversity (Bradshaw, 2019).
- All students attending schools with gender and sexuality alliances are less likely to miss school because of safety concerns compared to peers who attend schools without such alliances.
- Schools with gender and sexuality alliances help positively impact overall achievement and experiences for all students. These alliances benefit all students and provide a safe environment for everyone.

Adult Advisors

Gender and sexuality alliances should be student-initiated and established using the same protocols for other school groups, clubs or teams. These alliances are about valuing all people regardless of their gender and/or sexual diversity. If approached by a student to be an adult advisor of a gender and sexuality alliance, the adult could:

- discuss the request for an alliance with relevant staff members, including the school administrator, teacher/staff advisor, school counsellor, Elder, traditional Knowledge Keeper or other staff member;
- discuss with students why they want to start an alliance;
- review school division or First Nations and Métis education organizations' policies regarding extra-curricular groups, clubs or teams;
- provide students with any paperwork that is necessary to create a new group;
- support students in finding a meeting place that offers some level of privacy and confidentiality;
- help students create a way to promote the alliance in the school. Ensure the promotions explicitly state that alliances for gender and sexual diversity are welcoming of everyone (e.g., 2SLGBTQ+, allies, siblings of 2SLGBTQ+, youth of same-sex parents); and,
- support the planning of the first meeting. Meetings are facilitated by students, but they may need some support from the advisor, especially at the first few meetings.

Advisors of student alliances for gender and sexual diversity may provide guidance in organizing the clubs' activities and campaigns, supporting the visibility of and membership in the club, and encouraging community engagement and partnerships.

4. Family and Community Engagement

Students, families, community members, teachers, administrators, human service providers and government share responsibility for the safety and well-being of all children and youth, including those who are gender and sexually diverse.

For some students, schools may provide the first opportunity to discuss and deconstruct community norms about gender and sexual diversity. Like other potentially sensitive topics, it is important that schools engage their families, School Community Councils (SCC) and others in these important conversations.

Communicating where and how gender and sexual diversity is addressed in provincial curricula and in policies, and how it is supported in the school's physical and social environments will help to deepen the understanding and respect for differences. The SCC should be involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of school policies related to the safety and well-being of all students. Inviting students, families and staff to review school policies with the lens of supporting students and their families who are gender and sexually diverse will extend the breadth of the policies to consciously protect, support and include all of the students in the school.

Consider the following when communicating with families and community:

- Reflect on communications with the community throughout the year (e.g., open houses, three-way conferences, newsletters, assemblies, awards ceremonies or cultural events) and the messages that are or are not provided about the school's policies and practices regarding safety and acceptance of all students.
- Develop some key messages that could be reflected in your school's/school division's communications.

KEY TERMS

Terminology and language to describe experiences and identities are fluid, and identity terms mean different things to different people. These key terms aim to serve as a guide. Every definition does not and will not perfectly describe every individual's experience with an identity. For additional terms, please visit the [Government of Canada 2SLGTBQI+ terminology](#).

Assigned sex at birth (ASAB) the sex (male or female) assigned to a child at birth and most often based on the child's external anatomy.

Cisgender a person who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Coming out the process by which one accepts and/or comes to identify one's own sexual orientation or gender identity and shares their sexual orientation or gender identity with others.

Gender binary the idea that gender is strictly an either/or option of male/men/masculine or female/woman/feminine based on sex assigned at birth, rather than a continuum or spectrum of gender identities and expressions.

Gender conforming a person whose gender expression is perceived as being consistent with cultural norms expected for that gender. According to these norms, boys/men are or should be masculine, and girls/women are or should be feminine. Not all cisgender people are gender conforming and not all transgender people are gender non-conforming.

Gender dysphoria distress experienced by some individuals whose gender identity does not correspond with their assigned sex at birth. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) includes gender dysphoria as a diagnosis.

Gender expression the way an individual acts, dresses, speaks and behaves (i.e., masculine, feminine, androgynous). Gender expression does not necessarily correspond to assigned sex at birth or gender identity.

Gender fluid describes a person whose gender identity varies over time and may include male, female and non-binary identities.

Gender identity a person's internal sense of being a man/male, woman/female, both, neither, or another gender. It may change over the course of one's lifetime.

Gender non-conforming a person whose gender expression is perceived as being inconsistent with cultural norms expected for that gender (e.g., what it means to be a girl or to be a boy, or to be neither or to be both). Someone who is gender non-confirming can be cisgender or transgender.

Genderqueer a person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. Other terms for people whose gender identity falls outside the gender binary include gender variant, gender expansive, etc.

Heteronormativity the assumption that everyone is straight and that heteronormativity is superior to all other sexualities.

Intersectionality identities are influenced and shaped by race, class, ethnicity, sexuality/sexual orientation, gender/gender identity, physical disability, national origin, etc., as well as by the interconnection of all those characteristics.

Medical transition a long-term series of medical interventions that utilizes hormonal treatments and/or surgical interventions to change a person's body to be more congruent with their gender identity. Medical transition is the approved medical treatment for gender dysphoria.

Non-binary a person whose gender identity falls outside the traditional gender binary of male or female. Other terms include gender queer, gender variant, gender expansive, etc.

Questioning a person who is uncertain about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity; this can be a transitory or a lasting identity.

Queer an umbrella term used by some to describe people who think of their sexual orientation or gender identity as outside of societal norms. Some people view the term queer as more fluid and inclusive than traditional categories for sexual orientation and gender identity.

Sexual orientation romantic and sexual attraction for people of the same or another sex or gender.

Social transition a transgender person's process of creating a life that is congruent with their gender identity, which often includes asking others to use a name, pronoun, or gender that is more congruent with their gender identity. It may also involve a person changing their gender expression to match their gender identity.

Transgender a person whose gender identity differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. Also trans.

Two-Spirit an English term used to broadly capture concepts traditional to many Indigenous cultures. It is a culturally specific identity used by some Indigenous people to indicate a person whose gender identity, spiritual identity and/or sexual orientation comprises both male and female spirits.

Additional Content

The additional content listed below can be found in the online [Deepening the Discussion: Gender and Sexual Diversity Toolkit](#).

Title	Toolkit Module
CSCH Gender and Sexual Diversity Sample Planning Tool	Modules 4, 5, 6
Curriculum Outcomes and Gender and Sexual Diversity	Module 4
Discussion Questions for School-Based Administrators	Module 5
Gender-Inclusive School Checklist	Modules 4, 5, 6
Gender and Sexual Diversity Checklist for Educators	Module 5
Straight Privilege (Adults)	Module 1
Straight Privilege (Students)	Module 1
How to Prevent and Respond to Harassment in Schools	Module 5
Information and Discussion Questions for Educational Leaders	Module 5
Oppression and Privilege	Module 1
Questions and Answers	Module 1
Saskatchewan Curricula and Gender and Sexual Diversity	Module 4
Saskatchewan Ministry of Education Policy Statement	Module 6
Student Alliances for Gender and Sexual Diversity	Module 5
What Can One Teacher Do?	Modules 4, 5

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