



THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

Vancouver School Board, Committee III - Education & Student Services
580 W Broadway
Vancouver BC V6J 1W6

mlouie@vsb.bc.ca

Re: Revised policy on sexual orientation and gender identities

Dear Committee III Members:

I am writing as a researcher specializing in LGBTQ-inclusive education to commend Vancouver School Board on your recent proposed amendment to your policy on sexual orientation and gender identities.

As the principal investigator for the “First National Climate Survey on Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia in Canadian Schools” (2011), which surveyed over 3700 students across the country, I appreciated Vancouver School Board’s support for the study, which enabled us to implement the survey in VSB high schools and prepare a confidential report on VSB results that was submitted to you in 2010.

At the time of our study, the situation of transgender students was not as well understood as it is in the research and education community today, and it was common for educators and academics to be of the opinion that it was sufficient merely to add “transgender” to the list of identities covered under anti-homophobia policies without further amendments. We now know that this is not the case.

In fact, we changed the title of our project to include “Transphobia” because when we analyzed the data, we found that transgender students are even more likely than lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) students to be harassed and to experience weak school attachment. We found, for example, that:

- Transgender students (79%) are more likely than LGB students (70%) to see parts of their school as being unsafe for LGBTQ students (the spaces most often seen as unsafe being washrooms, changerooms and corridors).
- Transgender students (60%) are more likely than LGB students (46%) to have had mean rumours spread about their sexual orientation at school.
- Transgender students (63%) are more likely than LGB students (49%) to have been verbally harassed about their sexual orientation.
- Transgender students (74%) are more likely than LGB students (55%) to have been verbally harassed about their gender expression.
- Transgender students (37%) are more likely than LGB students (21%) to have been physically harassed about their gender expression.

These numbers point to levels of everyday victimization, and the depression, anxiety, and fear associated with it, that are far in excess of most adults’ experiences, and that would bring most of us to our knees.

We also found that transgender students are correspondingly more likely to feel unsafe at school (78% vs. 63% LGB students). They are as likely as LGB students to feel they can't be themselves at school (45% LGB vs. 43% trans) and to feel very depressed about school (56% LGB vs. 57.5% trans). As these findings and many, many others from the survey show, the more socially marginalized one is, the more likely one is to be treated badly and to suffer trauma at school. One of the chief findings from the Climate Survey was that the farther students are from the mainstream or the majority, the more danger they are in in Canadian schools.

I have worked with many teachers, principals, and psychologists from rural schools in socially conservative areas who have found themselves scrambling to figure out how to accommodate a traumatized transgender child because their school districts had not developed policy and programmatic support for transgender-inclusive education. I am very happy to see that Vancouver School Board is addressing the needs and rights of transgender students proactively through policy that reflects the realities of their everyday lives at school – what names they are called, how they dress, what washrooms and change-rooms they use, what sports they participate in.

Transgender students are statistically a small subgroup of students: they are among the most outnumbered, marginalized and harassed students in our nation's schools. They clearly need the support of school system officials if they are to have any chance of enjoying the safe and respectful education to which every child in every school is entitled. I sincerely commend you for your leadership in developing this clearly thoroughly investigated and carefully formulated policy proposal that reflects best practices in the area of transgender student accommodation. All students benefit when educators stand up for the most marginalized people in a community; implementing the proposed policy amendment would dramatically contribute to the health and wellbeing of terribly marginalized students.

With all best wishes,



Catherine G. Taylor, Ph.D.
Professor and Director of Academic Programs, Faculty of Education
The University of Winnipeg
515 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3B 2E9
204.786.9893 - c.taylor@uwinnipeg.ca