

May 26, 2014

Vancouver Board of Education  
School District #39  
1580 West Broadway  
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**In Support of the Vancouver School Board's Proposed Policy Revision on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identities**

We write this letter as members of a research team that includes many of the country's foremost experts in medicine, health sciences, and social sciences on the care, follow-up, and rights and recognition of transgender youth. Our research team represents all eight major clinics in the country that currently provide medical care to transgender youth, including six children's hospitals and two community-based health centres. This matter is of such concern to us, that we have recently proposed a study to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research in order to better understand the health of pediatric transgender patients receiving care across our clinics. Based on current medical opinion and best practices, we urge the Vancouver School Board to adopt the proposed policy revision on sexual orientation and gender identity to better protect the safety and wellbeing of transgender youth.

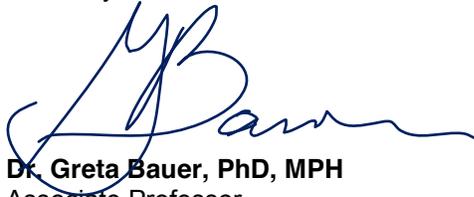
After reviewing the proposed policy changes, we find that the Vancouver School Board's focus on supporting transgender youth and reducing the discrimination they face is in keeping with current best practices for promoting health and wellbeing. European and US research has found that gender non-conforming children and trans youth encounter elevated levels of social exclusion,<sup>1</sup> for which detrimental health impacts have been well-documented in the general population.<sup>2</sup> Outcomes for trans youth can include self-harm, suicidality, anxiety and depression.<sup>3-5</sup> Canadian research (conducted by some members of this team) indicates that supporting trans youth in their self-identified gender can have real and sizeable effects on youth outcomes. For example, the Trans PULSE study recently found that when Ontario trans youth (age 16 to 24) had strong parental support for their stated gender identity, they were less depressed, had better self-esteem, were more likely to be housed, reported better mental and physical health, and their risk of a recent suicide attempt dropped by 93%.<sup>5</sup> Thus Canadian research suggests that supporting a young person's gender, as that young person identifies it, can in fact be life-saving.

As medical professionals and health researchers, we feel that the Vancouver School Board's proposed policy revisions provide a strong basis on which to support the health of transgender youth, including: access to safe washrooms that correspond to one's gender identity, safeguarding the privacy of trans youth, addressing harassment and hate, increasing education and training for teachers and school staff, and reducing the reliance on gender-segregated school activities in general. In fact, we believe these steps will help to promote the wellbeing of youth who are not transgender as well.

In the debate that surrounds this proposed policy revision, we have noticed an unfortunate tendency to pathologize transgender youth. In our professional opinion, the frequent calls for psychiatric consultation that we have heard, and the use of terms such as “disorder” and “dysfunction”, lack consistency with current medical opinion and best practice guidelines. As stated clearly in the most recent Standards of Care document produced by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH): “being transsexual, transgender, or gender non-conforming is a matter of diversity, not pathology”.<sup>6</sup>

In closing, while we write this letter as medical care providers and health researchers, we believe this issue is, primarily, non-medical. The safety and rights of transgender youth in schools is a matter of educational anti-discrimination policy – a matter about which the Pride Advisory Committee of the Vancouver School Board is more than qualified to develop effective policy. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



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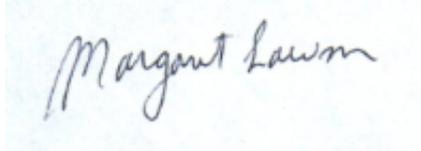
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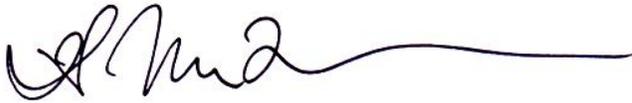


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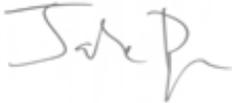
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